

No. 34

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ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY



JACK LIGHTFOOT'S DECISION

OR THAT CHESTNUT OF
"PLAYING AGAINST TEN MEN"



Jack waved his torch wildly, and the fast freight monster engine slowed up with a grinding and creaking of brakes.

Publishers' Note. "Teach the American boy how to become an athlete, and lay the foundation for a Constitution greater than that of the United States."—Wise sayings from "Tip Top." There has never been a time when the boys of this great country took so keen an interest in all manly and health-giving sports as they do to-day. As proof of this witness the record-breaking throngs that attend college struggles on the gridiron, as well as athletic and baseball games, and other tests of endurance and skill. In a multitude of other channels this love for the "life strenuous" is making itself manifest, so that, as a nation, we are rapidly forging to the front as seekers of honest sport. Recognizing this "handwriting on the wall," we have concluded that the time has arrived to give this vast army of young enthusiasts a publication devoted exclusively to invigorating out-door life. We feel we are justified in anticipating a warm response from our sturdy American boys, who are sure to revel in the stirring phases of sport and adventure, through which our characters pass from week to week.

ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY

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No. 34.

NEW YORK, September 30, 1905.

Price Five Cents.

JACK LIGHTFOOT'S DECISION;

[OR,

The Chestnut of "Playing Against Ten Men."

By MAURICE STEVENS.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

Jack Lightfoot, the best all-round athlete in Cranford or vicinity, a lad clear of eye, clean of speech, and, after he had conquered a few of his faults, possessed of a faculty for *doing things* while others were talking, that by degrees caused him to be looked upon as the natural leader in all the sports Young America delights in—a boy who in learning to conquer himself put the power into his hands to wrest victory from others.

Tom Lightfoot, Jack's cousin, and sometimes his rival; though their striving for the mastery was always of the friendly, generous kind. Tom was called the "Book-Worm" by his fellows, on account of his love for studying such secrets of nature as practical observers have discovered and published; so that he possessed a fund of general knowledge calculated to prove useful when his wandering spirit took him abroad into strange lands.

Ned Skeen, of impulsive, nervous temperament.

Lafe Lampton, a big, hulking chap, with an ever present craving for something to eat. Lafe always had his appetite along, and proved a staunch friend of our hero through thick and thin.

Phil Kirtland, Jack's former rival, but by degrees began to admire the sterling qualities in the young fellow at whom he had once sneered.

Nat Kimball, an undersized fellow, whose hobby was the study of *jiu-jitsu*, and who had a dread of germs.

Brodie Strawn, Wilson Crane, Jubal Marlin, three members of the Cranford team.

Reel Snodgrass, a young fellow from India, who hated Jack in the start, and never let a chance to do him a mean turn escape him.

Delancy Shelton, a rich man's son, careless alike of his money and his reputation.

Avery Rand, a member of the Highland baseball team, who was ready to win his game through foul means.

Lily Livingston, Daisy Lightfoot, Kate Strawn and Nellie Conner, some of the girls at Cranford.

CHAPTER I.

TALKING IT OVER.

The Cranford nine had slipped down another notch, by losing again to Tidewater, in a hot game, played on the Cranford grounds shortly after the events recorded in the preceding story, and they were not feeling very good over it.

They had started in at the beginning of the season determined to win the pennant of the Four-Town League.

For a time everything seemed to come their way—they walked to victory after victory.

Envious persons said it was a case of "luck," and not merit; there are so many chances in baseball that even an inferior nine may sometimes "strike a streak of luck."

Then Cranford "slumped." They lost two games straight—one with Tidewater and one with Mildale. And now they had lost again to Tidewater.

Only two more games were to be played by the Cran-

ford nine in the league games of the season, and to gain the pennant they must win both of these games.

If they won the first, to be played with Highland, they would be one game ahead of Tidewater.

After that, Tidewater would have a chance to make it even—or a tie. If Tidewater won and tied the standing, Tidewater and Cranford would have to play again, to decide the question as to which of the two was to be the pennant winner.

These were the things that were exciting the Cranford boys and filling the old gym over the carriage shop with a buzz of conversation.

"Well, it was a case of luck," said Ned Skeen, addressing the crowd generally. "Luck was dead against us in that last game."

"How about that muff you made?" asked Nat Kimball. "That let a man get first, when he shouldn't have done it, and later he came home. And then there was that error, when you overthrew to Brodie on first. Brodie would have had to use a stepladder to get that."

"Isn't that what I've been saying?" Ned howled, getting very red in the face. "When I overthrew, the ball slipped as I sent it. It got there in time, but it was too high. But I'm not the only one who made errors in that game. Jack let the spit ball get away from him and slammed it into the grand stand. How was that for hard luck?"

"I don't call overthrowing to first bad luck," asserted Kimball, warmly. "Luck is something that happens by chance. That didn't happen by chance; it happened because you were excited and in too big a hurry."

"Well, didn't other fellows make errors that day? I didn't play all the positions, did I? Didn't Tom Lightfoot make a bad fumble? And what about Lafe? Two of Jack's swift curves went right through him and men got bases on them. You remember that, don't you?"

Ned was apparently trying to offset his own shortcomings by pointing out that other members of the nine had made poor plays.

"And what right have you to criticise," he said to Nat, "when all you did was to sit in the benches and grumble when things went wrong?"

"Oh, when you go to getting red-headed that lets me out! I started in to argue, not to fight."

Nat turned away in disgust.

"But ain't I right, fellows?" said Skeen, turning to some of the others.

"Oh, you're right, all right," grunted Lafe, lazily, from his seat against the wall. "We were a lot of hoboos that day. But what's the use of tearing your

shirt about it? We lost the game, and that's all there is to it."

"But we needn't have lost it, if it hadn't been for those errors. That's what I was saying—that we played in hard luck."

"Isn't that about what every nine says when it's defeated?" Jack asked.

"Sure thing!" said Lafe. "Whenever a nine gets it in the neck they always try to make out that something besides themselves was responsible. We were whipped, and I'm ready to accept it and let it go at that. Take your medicine, fellows; what's the use of kicking? The question is—Is it going to happen again?"

"Well, it will, if we don't do any better than before!" cried Skeen. "All I'm trying to show is that I wasn't alone to blame."

"Who said you were?" Jack demanded.

"Well, didn't Nat Kimball just the same as say it?"

"Of course I didn't," Nat shouted; "but you were as much to blame as anyone else!"

"Did I let any runner get home on a throw of mine, when the ball was in my hands or near me? Answer that?"

"No, you didn't," Jack made answer, though the question had been fired at Kimball.

"Well, didn't Jube throw from left field to the plate, and make so wild a throw that the ball went into the crowd and Lafe couldn't get it in time to shut off the runner? Oh, come off! I guess there were a lot of errors made besides mine, and errors that were a good deal more serious."

"Quit your kicking," said Jack, "and save your wind for the tug of war with Highland. What's the use of arguing about it? We all made errors enough. If we'd played a perfect game of course we'd have won, but we didn't. I'm willing to take my share of the blame. I don't think I ever pitched such rotten ball; but I didn't do it because I liked to, but because I couldn't help it."

"Well, isn't that what you call bad luck?"

"Hardly."

"What do you call it?"

"Inability to deliver the goods," said Jack, laughing.

"If a player could be always in tiptop condition," said Tom, "and always feel well and fit, and never make any errors, and be able to catch and field and bat every ball that came to him—well, he wouldn't be playing in the Cranford nine and in the Four-Town League; he'd either be put in a glass case for the

curious to look at at so much a head, or he'd be getting a fortune a week as a salary in one of the big league teams. But I don't think such a player ever lived, or ever will live."

"Well," said Jack, finally, "there are just two more games in which we are to play. The first is against Highland to-morrow, and we've got to play it whether we feel fit or not. But I think we're in pretty good shape. It's been nearly a week since we met Tidewater, and we've been in practice every day and have done some good work. I think our chance of winning to-morrow is as good as in any game we've played this season."

Jack's reason and common sense told him that this was so.

Yet Jack had been plunged into one of his "blue fits" by that defeat, and had felt worse over it than he had ever acknowledged, or would ever acknowledge.

In going into that game with Tidewater he had hoped as strongly to win as he hoped now to win against Highland, and he and his nine had gone down in defeat.

There had been some ragged work right at the start, and Tidewater had then secured a lead which it had held up to and through the ninth inning. Jack felt that but for that ragged work in the beginning of the game that lead might not have been secured by Tidewater and the result might have been different. But the poor work had been done, and the defeat had come.

But when Jack, wallowing in this "Slough of Despond," took time to consider the whole situation, he began to see that there were some clouds with a silver lining.

He knew that it was against reason to think that his nine could win games all the time. They were playing against some strong nines, as strong as any amateur nines to be found anywhere in the high-school class. Hence it was to be expected that those nines would do good work and would win games.

Jack saw, however, that there was still a fair chance for that pennant.

If Cranford lost both of the games now to be played that would end its hopes. Then the fight would be between Tidewater and Highland. Mildale was out of the race, having dropped far behind; but the other three nines had each a fighting chance for the final victory.

Jack said as much now to the boys who were stewing in the gym.

In saying it, he found that he had a further in-

crease of his own courage, because the expression of a reasonable and honest hope has a stimulating effect. If Jack had said it and had not believed it, he would simply have been making a liar and hypocrite of himself, and would have felt no inner strengthening.

He had already thought the thing out at home, and as he went about the streets, and that had assisted him, making him see that the chances were yet good; and this helped him still more, to look into the eyes of the honest fellows who accepted his leadership, and assure them that he believed with all his heart that they had more than a good show to win.

"Of course, we've got to play for all that's in us," he acknowledged, speaking earnestly. "It's not going to be any walkover; there isn't any toboggan slide downhill to an easy victory. If we win we'll have to win because of good playing, and because we take advantage of every chance that comes our way and of all the errors the other nine makes. But, fellows, I believe we can do it! We're all in good condition, and right up to the handle with our signal work. We may lose, of course; but I'm beginning to feel that we're going to win."

"We've got to win both games, you know," said Skeen.

"Yes, of course."

"And you think we can do it?"

"Why can't we? We've defeated Highland oftener than they've defeated us. Doesn't that make it seem that the chances are all in our favor?"

"Yes, it does."

"And there's one thing, fellows; and I'm proud of it, as the season draws to its finish." Jack was speaking with deep seriousness. "We've done no dirty work. We've won a good many games, and have lost some; but we always won by fair, square playing. We never tried to do any other nine dirt."

"I don't think that can be said of the other nines," remarked Wilson Crane.

"By granny, not one of 'em!" cried Jubal. "Some of them fellows air the biggest swindlers aout; they'd ought to be in the pen!"

"But we've done some high, old kicking against decisions now and then," said Lafe, with a grin.

"Oh, yes, of course," Jack admitted.

"And that Highland craowd is abaout the wust among 'em."

"Not half as bad as Mildale," said Skeen. "That Mildale nine is a band of pirates."

The boys were beginning to feel better.

"We'll do some practice work in the morning," said

Jack; "throwing to the bases and the like of that, and I think we'll be in pretty good shape. Cranford ought to——"

His remarks were cut short.

From somewhere came a sepulchral voice:

"Hurrah for Cranford—hurrah for Jack Lightfoot!"

The boys who were sitting down jumped to their feet, and all stared around.

"Was that somebody on the street guying us?" said Ned.

Then again came the words:

"Hurrah for Cranford—hurrah for Jack Lightfoot!"

A strange look came across the homely face of Jubal Marlin.

"By granny, I don't want tew be superstitious; but that saounds like the parrot, an' the parrot is dead!"

CHAPTER II.

LILY LIVINGSTON'S PURCHASE.

That the reader may know in detail just why and how those words came to be heard in the gym at that particular time it will be necessary to go back a few days and conduct him to the city of New York, where Lily Livingston and her mother and Delancy Shelton had gone for a brief shopping trip.

Lily desired some new summer gowns, her mother wished to make various purchases for herself, and Delancy went with them because he had not been in the city for some time, and likewise because he liked the society of the nut-brown maid whose home was now in Cranford.

New York was a gay world, in which Delancy delighted immensely. But its pace was almost too fast for him to remain there a great while at a time, unless he wanted to bring up in some sanitarium for gilded youths with wrecked nerves and ruined health.

Miss Lily and her mother had finished their shopping, and, in company with Delancy, were idling along the street, when that cry was squawked at them from a doorway:

"Hurrah for Cranford! Hurrah for Jack Lightfoot!"

To hear that cry, a ghostly echo as it seemed from some ball field of the Four-Town League, was startling enough there in the heart of the metropolis.

Lily turned with an exclamation of excitement and surprise to the doorway, and saw that the interior was a bird store.

Birds of many hues were making a continual chatter.

Near the door were some cages in which parrots perched.

All of them looked sleepy enough, as if they were tired of the interminable roar of the city and longed for their homes and friends of the tropical forests.

Lily and her mother, with Delancy just behind them, looked into the store.

Toward the further end were some men, one of whom began to walk toward them.

"Why, can I have been mistaken?" said Lily. "Was that just my imagination playing me a trick?"

As if to answer her, one of the parrots before her half opened its sleepy eyes and squawked:

"Hurrah for Cranford! Hurrah for Jack Lightfoot!"

Lily's tanned cheeks flushed, but a light of understanding came to her eyes.

"Why, it's this parrot!"

"Bah Jove, don't y' know, that's funny!" said Delancy, pulling at the few hairs he was trying to coax into a mustache.

"It's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of!" exclaimed Mrs. Livingston, staring at the bird. "Did it really say that, Lily?"

"It really did. It was cheering for Cranford and Jack Lightfoot."

"But how impossible that is—how absurd! We couldn't have understood what it said."

The parrot rolled its yellow eyes at her and lifted its green wings.

"Ha! ha! ha!" it cackled. "Hooray—hooroar! Hurrah for Cranford! Hurrah for Jack Lightfoot! Hip, hip, hoop-la! Ha! ha! ha! hah! hah! hah! haw! haw! haw! Hurrah for Cranford! Hurrah for Jack Lightfoot!"

Mrs. Randolph Livingston was petrified with astonishment.

She could not doubt what she heard; but still the thing seemed too absurd for belief.

"Why, I don't understand it!" she said. "How did that bird——"

Lily was laughing with amusement.

"Beats anything, don't y' know!" said Delancy, pulling at the fine hairs on his lip and swinging his light cane. "It does, bah Jove!"

The man came up.

"Anything I can do for you?" he asked.

Lily Livingston pointed to the bird.

"That parrot! What is it worth?"

"Twenty-five dollars. It's a very fair talker—very good! Here, you—Cranford!"

He poked at the bird with his fingers.

"Can you do some talking for the ladies? Or whistle a tune?"

The parrot resented the indignity and snapped at his fingers; and then, swinging by its beak, it left the perch and climbed along the cage with beak and claws; returning, restlessly, to the perch after this futile round.

Miss Lily was smiling as if she saw through a joke that was still blind to the others.

"Why do you call it Cranford?" she inquired of the man.

"Hurrah for Cranford! Hurrah for Jack Lightfoot!" said the parrot.

"There is your answer. It keeps saying its name that way, you see. The other is probably the name of a former owner."

"How long have you had it?"

"One or two months, possibly."

"And where did you get it?"

"From a dealer. We are buying and selling birds all the time."

"Do you know where he obtained it?"

The man looked at her quizzically; for her questions were, to say the least, peculiar. He began to wonder if she were not the former owner of the bird.

"I haven't the least idea where he got it. We never trouble about such things. But it's been trained, you see, and as it's a quick learner you could probably teach it a number of words and sentences, and even songs, without much trouble. It whistles several tunes. Here, Cranford, can you whistle something for the ladies?"

But "Cranford" seemed to be in no whistling mood that day.

Lily Livingston took out her purse.

"I'm going to buy this bird!"

Mrs. Randolph Livingston elevated her patrician nose.

"No, Lily, you mustn't do anything of the kind; what would we do with it?"

"Why, don't you understand, mamma?"

"I understand that I don't want a parrot squawking round in my home."

"It will not be in our home."

"In whose then, pray?"

"In the gym. Don't you see that this is the parrot the baseball boys lost last spring and which they thought had wandered out into the fields and had died or been killed? It must be the same."

Mrs. Livingston put her glasses on her nose and

stared at the bird with more interest, and Delancy "bah-Joved" several times under his breath.

"Did you ever see that parrot?" she asked of Lily.

"Never; but I've heard all about it; and this must be the same. How, otherwise, would it know to shout for Cranford?"

"And for Jack Lightfoot, don't y' know?" said Delancy.

"Yes, and for Jack Lightfoot?"

"And you'd buy it and give it the baseball boys?"

"Don't you think that would be rather a pretty thing to do?"

"Lily," said her mother, sharply, "I hope you won't purchase that disgusting bird! (It may not be the same bird; and, anyway——"

"But, mamma," said Lily, and she took her mother's arm and drew her to one side, where she spoke in a low voice, while Delancy remained to talk with the bird dealer, "don't you see how desirable it would be?"

"In what way, my dear? I see only a horrid, squawking parrot. Suppose it was once the property of the baseball boys and of Jack Lightfoot, why should you trouble to buy it and return it to them?"

"But don't you see, mamma, it would help us—both of us?"

Then Mrs. Livingston began to understand.

"Certain things have happened, you know, mamma, which have rather hurt both of us in Cranford. We've been a little indiscreet in our attitude toward Jack Lightfoot. This would tend to gain his good will. It would show our friendship, don't you know; and all the baseball boys would like it."

"Indiscreet" was a mild word for the acts of which Lily's mamma especially had been guilty. She had grossly insulted Jack one day during a camping trip at Loon Lake, and in many other ways had shown her haughty arrogance and her sense of contempt for him, because at the time she had felt that he was so much beneath her socially.

But she had found that Jack Lightfoot had many warm friends in Cranford, and her treatment had not met with approval. She had discovered that Jack's family, though far enough from being wealthy, stood very high in Cranford, as high as the family of Tom Lightfoot, though Tom's parents possessed a good deal of money and property.

Mrs. Livingston had made the common mistake of people of her class in supposing that worthiness and wealth are synonymous terms, only to find that there were several wealthy families in Cranford not nearly

so much respected as Jack Lightfoot and his mother and sister.

Having taken that unwise step against Jack and discovered their mistake too late, Mrs. Livingston and her daughter were anxious to retrace it, and the parrot had just given the nut-brown maid a happy idea.

"If we return the parrot to the gym and present it as a gift to the boys, it will so please them that they'll forget some of the things that have happened," you know, Lily urged. "Jack will be particularly pleased, and so will all the others. I think it will be just great. They don't like Mr. Shelton; but that's no reason why they may not like me, and you, mamma; and, perhaps, Delancy will feel by and by that it's wiser to cultivate their good opinion than not to."

A sort of hot feeling of indignation seemed to bubble and boil in the bosom of Mrs. Randolph Livingston.

It hurt her dignity and sense of importance to feel that it was necessary for her to try to win the good opinion of Jack Lightfoot.

But Jack Lightfoot had been warmly championed by Kate Strawn—and the Strawns were among the social lights of the town. Mrs. Strawn was one of the leaders of the fashionable "set" in Cranford. The fact that Mrs. Strawn did not seem to like Jack particularly made no difference; for Kate Strawn ruled her mother, in the opinion of Mrs. Livingston and her daughter.

"If it wasn't for Kate!" said Mrs. Livingston, as if she were biting nails.

"Yes, I know; but she has to be reckoned with. Her mother thinks so much of her that Kate always has her own way; Kate, you know, invited Jack to that last reception, as well as to the camp at Loon Lake, and so as we're likely to be thrown with him a good deal in spite of ourselves. I think we'd better try to get his good opinion, don't you?"

"Oh, I suppose so; yes, we'll have to! But it makes my very blood boil!"

Mrs. Livingston's blood seemed far enough from the boiling point as she turned back to the dealer with smiling face and informed him that she believed she would take the parrot.

"Bah Jove, you don't mean it?" Delancy gasped.

"It will be such fun," said Lily; "such a surprise to the boys! I know it's their parrot—their mascot, they called it. You remember hearing the talk about it, Delancy?"

"Oh, I heard that, y' know; but it seems so deuced queer, don't y' know, to buy the parrot and give it

back to them! I should think you'd rather send it further in the other direction?"

Delancy was not as artful as Lily and her mother.

"But it will please them so," Lily urged. "And, perhaps, it will help them to win games, to get their mascot back. They lost that last game, you know."

She looked at Delancy demurely.

"Bah Jove, you're a funny girl! I wouldn't have thought of you doing such a thing. And as for them winning games, don't y' know, I don't care a—a fig if they never win one."

"I suppose you'd rather they'd lose them?" said Lily, slyly.

Mrs. Livingston laughed, in what she intended to be a light and amused manner, but which sounded almost hysterical. She was not pleased with what she was about to do; she would much have preferred to slap Jack Lightfoot in the face and tell him he was a conceited youngster in daring to think for a moment that he was anywhere near as good as she was. But that would not have been social diplomacy.

"How are you going to get it up there, bah Jove?" Delancy gasped, when he saw Lily again open her purse.

Lily looked at the bird dealer.

"We live in Cranford, up beyond Cardiff; you know where it is, I presume?"

"I can find out, miss."

"Yes, and—well, we want you to ship this bird to Cardiff."

She gave him her card.

"Ship it to Cardiff to-morrow, and notify me when you ship it, so that I can arrange to have it brought over to Cranford. Now, remember, I don't want it to go direct to Cranford. It was stolen from there, I don't doubt, for it used to be the property of the Cranford baseball nine, and they called it their mascot."

"Oh, yes, I see!" The man nodded. "That's why it hurrahs for Cranford. Oh, yes, I see!"

He took the money which Lily gave him.

"I want to surprise them by getting it back there unknown to them; so you will understand why I don't want it shipped by express direct to Cranford. Some one would see it there in the express office and tell about it, and then that would spoil the surprise. I'll arrange to have it brought quietly over from Cardiff, and then surprise them by returning it. It will be awfully jolly, I think, and will please them."

"It ought to please them immensely."

"And you'll ship it as I direct?"

"Certainly, certainly; just as you say, and we'll start

it to-morrow afternoon. Would you like to look at some other birds? We've got a great variety, and——"

But Lily and her mother had turned back into the street, and were hastening away.

There was a flush of pleasure on the tanned cheek of the nut-brown maid.

"Mamma, I think that is one of the luckiest things that ever happened—for us!"

"Well, I'm sure I hope so," was the answer, given rather stiffly; "but I'm sure it makes me feel as if I had lowered myself to even think of Jack Lightfoot and those horrid baseball boys."

"You don't mean all of them—you don't mean Brodie and Phil and some of the others?"

"I mean merely Jack Lightfoot, my dear."

"But how wonderfully popular he is!"

"He's a cad, don't y' know!" said Delancy, striking the pavement viciously with his cane. "He's a—a regular—goose!"

CHAPTER III.

THE RETURN OF THE PARROT.

"Ha! ha! ha! Hah! hah! hah! Haw! haw! haw! Hooray—hoorooar! Hurrah for Cranford! Hurrah for Jack Lightfoot. Hoop-la! Ha! ha! ha! Hurrah for——"

"By granny, if that ain't that gol-darned parrot, I'm a goat!" shouted Jubal Marlin.

The boys had risen in surprise and were looking round the gym with much mystification, when that cackling roar broke out again, with those hurrahs for Cranford and for Jack.

"By gum, it's in the office!"

Jubal and the other boys scrambled toward the railed space in one corner of the gym which Jubal called his "office," and from which that shouting and shrieking issued, apparently, when they were astounded to see emerge from behind some curtains hanging there Miss Lily Livingston and Kate Strawn, accompanied by Kate's brother, Brodie.

The boys stopped, staring in amazement.

Jubal's homely face flushed to a deep red.

"By hemlock, yeou was doin' that, jist to fool us!"

Brodie and Kate and Lily laughed, and Lily clapped her hands.

Kate stooped and swung up into view a big cage containing a large, green bird.

And the bird, perhaps recalling old days in the gym, began to squawl again:

"Hoop-la! Ha! ha! ha! Hurrah for Cranford! Hurrah for Jack Lightfoot!"

Jack was as much surprised and puzzled as anyone; but he saw that this was Polly, the old mascot, and he gave a cheer, in which all the other young fellows joined.

"The mascot, by granny!" yelled Jubal, jumping toward the cage. "Where in time did you git her? I thought she was dead."

Brodie smiled rather foolishly. He had been dragged into this thing somewhat unwillingly by his sister, Kate.

Lily took the cage from Kate and held it up.

"Did you ever see that bird before?"

"Wow! did we ever see it?" snorted Jubal, stopping in front of the cage. "Well, I guess yes; that's Polly, consarn her! Where'd you find her?"

"Howling mackerels!" Ned Skeen was gasping; while the other fellows were relieving their feelings by sundry characteristic exclamations and ejaculations.

"Permit me to present to you, members of the baseball nine, and to you, Mr. Jack Lightfoot, captain of the same, your old mascot, returned to you after many and strange wanderings, but still in good voice and able to cheer for Cranford with all of its old-time vim."

Lily Livingston, holding the cage and the bird, tipped forward on her toes, making a very attractive picture of a summer girl, as she made this little speech.

She held the cage out to Jack; but Jubal made a grab for it.

"By granny, it's Polly, shore enough! Fellers, it's her, the consarned critter; hip-hip-hip—all together: Hooray—hoorooar—hoorooar!"

The cheering thundered to the roof, making the old rafters shake.

"Now, I'll tell you all about it," said Miss Lily, smiling as the boys crowded round the group of three and round the parrot, which Jubal, by virtue of the fact that he had been Polly's keeper and trainer, seemed to regard as his especial property; "let me tell you all about it."

She waved her hands for silence.

"Hear, hear!" cried Lafe in his lazy way, with his lazy imitation of the English.

"Keep still, fellows, and give Miss Livingston a chance to speak," Jack urged.

The din began to subside.

"It was this way," said Lily. "Mamma and I found that bird by chance in a bird store in New York, and I bought it of the dealer, for I knew it must be yours."

And now I wish to present it to you; and I hope—we all hope”—she smiled, charmingly, showing her white teeth and her attractive smile—“that it will lead you to victory in the game to-morrow, and in that other game you’re to play with Tidewater.”

Jack Lightfoot was a generous youth.

He caught up his cap and swung it round his head.

“Fellows, three cheers for Miss Livingston!”

The cheers were given with a will.

“Miss Lily, you’re a brick!” cried Lafe Lampton, enthusiastically.

“Thank you; just so you don’t think that I’ve got a heart of *stone*.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” the parrot broke in. “Hurrah for Cranford!”

“By gum, I’m goin’ to teach Polly to yell fer Miss Lily,” cried Jubal.

“Oh, that would be delightful!”

She beamed on Jubal, who was holding the cage aloft and fairly dancing in his joy.

“But I didn’t get through with my little speech,” she urged.

“Hear, hear!” cried Lafe, stamping the floor.

“I bought the bird, as I said, down in New York, and then had it shipped to Cardiff, for I wanted to surprise you. I had it brought over from there this afternoon and taken to Strawn’s, where it was kept until a little while ago. I couldn’t think of any good way to get it down here secretly, to make the surprise complete, until Kate suggested the plan we adopted. We got Brodie to come with us—girls can never do anything without getting some boy to help them, you know!” She smiled bewitchingly as she said this. “And he came, like the good fellow he is. We thought we’d maybe have to take Jubal into our confidence, for he has the key; but Brodie had one that would fit, and so we let ourselves in, just before the rest of you began to come. But, really, I thought I should die, in that little place, with those curtains hanging down over my face, but we wanted to hear what you’d say, you know. I was just crazy to hear one of your meetings and see how you do. And is that the way you do—fight each other with words because you lose games sometimes? Well, it was funny, anyway!”

Ned Skeen felt very warm and uncomfortable, as he wondered vainly if he had by any chance said anything to give offense to Brodie and his sister and Miss Lily. He knew he had said a good deal, and it troubled him now to recall just what he did say.

Others there were feeling somewhat like Ned; for, thinking no one but boys and members of the club

and baseball nine were in the room, they had talked loudly and freely.

“Well, eavesdroppers never hear any good of themselves! That’s all I’ve got to say, if they did hear anything!”

That was the way Ned Skeen tried to comfort himself and cover up his uneasiness.

“The parrot must have been stolen,” said Jack.

“And we thought it was dead!” cried Nat.

“Oh, it was stolen, of course,” Kate interjected. “Some one stole it from the gym, or found it outside somewhere and carried it off, and probably sold it in Cardiff.”

“Who do you suppose would do so mean a thing?” asked Bob Brewster.

“Plenty of people,” said Skeen. “Howling mackereels, fellows, this is a propitious sign! Say, I believe we’re certain to win that game to-morrow now.”

“We just can’t lose it!” yelled Jubal.

Then he began to march round the room with the parrot, singing:

“Glory, glory, halleluyah!”

And a lot of other fellows joining him, they proceeded to turn the old gym into a pandemonium.

The excitement keyed Polly up to the highest pitch, and she “hurrahed” and cackled and whooped in a manner to please even her warmest admirer.

“Oh, say this is great,” yelled Jubal, “findin’ the mascot jist before that game! By gum, if I had a bat in my hand and a ball was comin’ tew me naow I feel’s if I could land it over the moon.”

Finally, when Jubal and the other enthusiasts had about howled themselves out of breath and began to quiet down, Jack took his seat at the table and rapped with his knuckles for order.

“Fellows,” he said, standing up and addressing the club members, “Miss Livingston has placed us under great obligations by returning to us our old mascot, and——”

“What about Rex, now?” Kate interjected, with a laugh.

“We’ll have two mascots,” cried Skeen; “half a dozen wouldn’t hurt.”

“We need ’em!” said Lafe, grimly.

“She has made us deeply her debtor, by returning to us our old mascot,” Jack went on; “and we will want to thank her in some proper manner for it.”

Ned Skeen came to his feet like a jack-in-the-box popping into view.

“Mr. President—Mr. President. I now move you

that the baseball nine and the athletic club give Miss Lily Livingston a vote of thanks for what she has done, and refund to her out of our treasury the amount she paid——"

"No! no! no!" Lily cried, starting to her feet; "I couldn't think of anything of the kind."

Ned stammered and seemed at a loss how to go on.

"I mean I make a motion, Mr. President," he said, getting his bearings again, "that we give Miss Livingston our vote of thanks, and that the same be spread on the minutes, and a copy of the same be presented to her in due and proper form."

Lafe tried to get on his feet to second the motion, but moved too slowly.

Nat Kimball bobbed up ahead of him.

"I second that motion," he cried, with enthusiasm.

Then the motion was put and carried unanimously by a rising vote.

When it had been carried, Lily rose gravely enough, and said as sweetly as she could, how happy she was to be able to do this thing, and how gratified and pleased she was that it gave such pleasure to the members.

"And those resolutions," she exclaimed, "if you do give me a copy of them, I shall keep forever and ever!"

"A long time!" Lafe grunted to himself.

"You'll get a copy of the vote of thanks," said Jack. "We'll have the secretary make it out and give it to you to-morrow. And in addition to this formal vote of thanks, I know that everyone here feels grateful for what you have done, and all those who are absent will feel the same as soon as they know of it."

"Mamma," said Lily that night, speaking to her mother, "you'd ought to have been there! Oh, it was fun—fun! I almost wish I was a boy, so that I could belong to a club like that. It's awfully jolly. You'd ought to have heard Ned Skeen scrapping away about the loss of that other game. But it was just the thing we needed to do, mamma. It smooths everything over, and the past will be all forgotten."

She stood before her mirror, taking the pins out of her brown hair.

"And Jack Lightfoot is a nice fellow, mamma—just as nice as he can be; he really made a beautiful speech, in thanking me for the return of the parrot. The only trouble is, you know, that we didn't think he was so nice, and didn't understand how well he stands here in the town, simply because we were strangers, you know, and heard some rather derogatory talk about him by people who didn't like him."

She meant Reel Snodgrass and Delancy Shelton,

from whom she had received her first impressions of Jack Lightfoot.

Mrs. Livingston sniffed loftily.

"I still don't think he's such a paragon, my dear!"

"Not a paragon, no; but just a nice, sensible young fellow. And I'm glad we ran across that parrot."

"Well, I am, too—or I'm willing to be, if it will help matters any."

"Help matters, mamma? It's already helped matters. You'll see!"

CHAPTER IV.

A PAIR OF PLOTTERS.

While Jubal and other members of the Cranford nine and gym club were cutting up "high jinks" and turning themselves into imitation wild Indians in the gym over the return of the parrot, a certain member of the Highland nine, who had come to Cranford on a sinister mission bent, passed the gym on his way uptown from the lake.

He was with Reel Snodgrass, whom he had met down at the academy boathouse.

"What's the row?" he inquired, when he heard that outburst of hilarious sound.

"They're celebrating the victory they're going to win over you fellows to-morrow, I suppose," Reel answered.

"They'd better postpone their gayety until after they win the game!"

"Jack Lightfoot and his gang belong to the cocksure crowd, you know. No doubt they've figured out the whole thing, just how they're going to do you up."

"I always put off my hilarity until I'm out of the woods!"

"Yes, all sensible fellows do."

The crowd in the gym was still whooping when they passed on up the street into the town.

"You said you wanted to see me on some very particular business," said Reel. "Come up to our rooms in the hotel; we'll have it quiet there."

The rooms belonged to Delancy Shelton—that is, he paid for them—but Reel made himself as much at home in them as if he footed the bills.

When the light of the hotel lamp shone on his face the fellow from Highland was revealed to the clerk as Avery Rand, first bagman for the Highlanders.

The clerk merely looked up at Rand's athletic figure, well-knit, strong, and rather handsome, vanished up the stairway with Reel Snodgrass.

"You didn't see that game in which Cranford was

licked by Tidewater?" said Rand, dropping into an easy-chair, when they were in Delancy's room.

He was glad to see that Delancy was out, for his business was solely with Reel.

"No, I didn't go. I thought they'd win, of course; and I was tired of that, you know. So I stayed at home."

"Well, you missed something good. That game was a corker. They worried Jack Lightfoot for two bases on balls in the third inning, and then a solid drive sent the man from second flying home. They'd already got a lead, and they now held it. The Cranford boys saw that they were playing a losing game and they went all to pieces. I never saw such rotten work."

Reel's tanned face took on a look of delight. This sort of talk pleased him.

"Oh, they were hoboes!" Rand went on. "They had only two runs up to the eighth inning. Then an error by Ned Skeen, and a muff and a wild throw by that Yankee who was trying to play left field, let another run in for the Tidewater boys."

"In the ninth Cranford tried to make a rally. Jack Lightfoot was wild. His face was as red as fire. 'We've got to do something, fellows!' he yelled. But Tidewater had the first half of the inning, and they cracked out two more runs."

"In Cranford's half, the head of their batting order came up, putting Tom Lightfoot at the stick. He went out on a fly; but Brodie Strawn, that black-faced tiger, who always looks as if he were chewing nails and they disagreed with his digestion, cracked out a double down the right-field line."

"Mack Remington got a base by being hit with the ball, and Lafe Lampton fouled out."

"Then Ned Skeen came up, and actually he was so excited he couldn't see. It was one, two, three with little Ned, and the thing was over; and Cranford was the worst whipped nine that has played at Tidewater this season."

He chuckled gleefully.

"Hardly as badly whipped as you fellows were by Cranford not long ago, though," said Reel, rather viciously. "You fellows got a clean whitewash."

"Yes, we did, I admit; but we had a beastly run of luck that day."

"And the umpire was against you, you said?"

"The worst of it is, we're to have the same umpire to-morrow—Sandy McLean. He's said to be the fairest and best umpire in this section of the country, but I don't believe it. He certainly bore down hard on us in that other game."

He shoved his hands into his pockets, to hide his nervousness.

"And that's why I've come over to see you; on my own account, you know—strictly on my own account."

He gave Reel a keen look to see if he was in a receptive mood.

Reel sat with the side of his face toward him, smoking and looking toward the window. He had slipped well down into his easy-chair in a slouching attitude. He wore no vest; his blue coat was open, showing his negligee shirt and blue tie, and his right leg—he wore light-colored trousers—was thrown lazily over the arm of the chair. The light straw hat which he still sported though the season was getting late for it, was pulled well down over his dark eyes. Hence, it was a very unsatisfactory glance that Avery Rand secured, and he could not tell whether Reel would like to help him or not.

"What is it you want me to do?" said Reel at last.

Avery Rand's face flushed and he hesitated.

"I—I didn't know but you might be able to suggest something. If Sandy McLean hands out decisions against us as he did before we're going to have a hard time of it to-morrow. And"—he bent toward Reel—"we've got to win that game!"

"Yes, I suppose you'd like to."

"You see, it's really our last chance for the pennant. If we're defeated to-morrow, then the pennant will go either to Cranford or to Tidewater. We've still got a chance. If we can beat Cranford and then can beat Tidewater we'll be tied with Tidewater; and then if we can beat Tidewater again we win out."

"So, you've got to win three games straight?"

"Yes."

"And Cranford has to win only two."

"Yes, that's right; but we've a big chance. And we've got to win. And that's why I came over to see you. I know you don't like Jack Lightfoot's crowd, and I thought——"

He stopped in hesitation, again studying the side of Reel's face.

Reel sat with his cigar in his mouth, still looking toward the window, and seemed to be thinking.

And there was a good deal for Reel Snodgrass to think about now.

When he had first appeared in Cranford he had been well received by Jack and his friends. He had been put on the nine, and had been given a chance to show what he could do. He liked sports, and particularly

baseball, and when that chance came to him he had been delighted.

Then he had traitorously given the signals to the opposing captain, and for that had been kicked out of the Cranford nine.

But Reel knew—what Jack Lightfoot and his associates did not—that he had been really forced into that bit of treachery by Borlmo, the pretended Hindoo. Reel could not tell that in defense of himself, and so had to rest under the stigma of a treachery that had no redeeming features.

Since then he had, in a spirit of revenge, set out to "do dirt" to Jack Lightfoot and his crowd.

He had tried innumerable tricks, some with the aid of Delancy; and at the end of all he had discovered that he had been playing a losing game.

Instead of permanently injuring Jack Lightfoot, he had only injured himself; and now he began to see that he was regarded with something like contempt by many of the best people of the town.

It was not a pleasant discovery.

In addition to this, in his efforts to down Jack Lightfoot, and because at the time he was in a rage or drinking, Reel had several times committed acts that might have sent him to prison.

All these things came before him as he sat smoking quietly and looking at the window, and he was asking himself if the thing paid, and if he ought not to change about face before he had irretrievably ruined himself in the estimation of Cranford.

Reel had a certain pride which made him wish to stand well, even though he did not deserve to. In Reel's catalogue of offenses, the greatest was the sin of being found out. And he knew he was being found out.

"I don't see that I can do anything," he said, finally, throwing his leg off the arm of the chair, taking the cigar out of his mouth, and turning round to face Rand.

"I thought you might suggest something," said Rand. "You're mighty clever, you know!"

That touched Reel's weak spot; for he thought, himself, that he was pretty clever.

"I fell down in what I tried to do when Cranford played you that other time, you know," he reminded.

Reel had hired a city thug named Neil Burdock to "thump the tar" out of Jack Lightfoot and Phil Kirtland, the pitcher and substitute pitcher of the nine—thinking that if these two were put out of the game Cranford could not possibly win.

The thing had been a miserable failure; for Rex, the collie, and Fighting Saul Messenger, not to mention

almost every member of the nine, had leaped on Burdock and the thugs who were with him, and had used them up pretty badly, after which they had been arrested and marched away to the station house.

That was the way *that* plan of Reel's had worked out.

"I didn't know but you might give me some kind of a drug, you know, that would make some of them sick, or something like that?" Rand ventured, showing how villainous he was. "I've heard you're pretty well up in those queer East Indian drugs."

"Whose been telling you that?"

"Oh, well, I heard it!"

"That's an old scheme," said Reel, half contemptuously. "It's been tried hundreds of times, I suppose."

"But it works, sometimes."

"Yes, sometimes."

"But the Cranford fellows are sharp as tacks," said Reel. "There's only one that I think a game of that kind could be worked on, and that's that hog, Lafe Lampton. He'd eat anything that was set before him, and never ask a question."

"Well, he's the catcher!" said Rand, eagerly. "That would bu'st the battery!"

Reel sat staring at him.

"I might do that—give you something—if you could do the rest of the trick?"

"Oh, I could work that. I know a waiter in that restaurant where Lafe goes to fill up before every game, and he'd work it for me; or we might invite the Cranford boys to dinner, and work it then. Something that would make him sick, you know, without really injuring him; just make him sick so that he couldn't play in the game, you know."

"I don't think much of it," said Reel, in hesitation. "Can't you think up something better—something more original, which they won't be looking for?"

"Well, no, I can't think of a thing, except that, and I've been hammering my head for a week for some good scheme."

Reel put the cigar back into his mouth as if he hoped that would stimulate his ingenuity.

"If Jack and Phil could be knocked out, so that they wouldn't have any strong man in the pitcher's place, that would be the ticket; but I really haven't anything against Phil. He's a pretty nice sort—stuck on himself a little, but that's no great fault."

Suddenly he slapped his knee.

"By George, I think I have it!"

"Good!" cried Rand.

"Yes, I have it; if you can use that drug on Lafe Lampton."

"I'll guarantee to work that, all right."

"Well, you know, if Lafe is knocked out the only man that can go behind the bat and do fair work there is Phil Kirtland. Brodie might try it, or Tom, but Phil would be the boy for the place, and Jack would sure put him there. And he'd be pretty good; Phil's one of these all-round players who is pretty good wherever you put him, but not really first-class in any position, though he thinks he is. Not first-class, I mean, like Jack and Lafe."

"Yes, I understand."

"Yet he would still be a rather dangerous proposition behind the bat, and you might lose your game with him there."

"Yes, I see."

"He's proud, you know, proud as Lucifer—stuck on himself, as I said. And because of that, and because he thinks he ought to have been captain of the nine this season, he's been feeling not just right toward Jack. I've seen that all along. Sometimes he even refuses to do what Jack orders, and makes trouble in the nine, just because of that."

"Yes, I've heard of it."

"Now, if some scheme could be worked to stir up trouble between Jack and Phil, and so get Phil's mad up, he would refuse to play in that game, and there you'd have them, in my opinion, with Lafe out of the way. They might win against you, but I don't believe they could, if you played good ball."

"That's the trick," said Rand; "that's great; but how're you going to work it?"

Reel rose from his chair and went over to a writing desk, where he took from a drawer a letter. He opened it and read it; it was a short note from Jack Lightfoot which he had received some time before.

After studying it closely he took a pen and paper and wrote a close imitation of Jack's handwriting, in these words:

"PHIL: I'd thank you not to annoy my sister with your company so much. She doesn't like to say so, but I have no hesitancy in doing so. It's not pleasing to any of us.

JACK LIGHTFOOT."

Having written this he brought it over for Rand's inspection.

"Jack's got a hummer of a sister—pretty as they make 'em, and Phil's been hanging around her a good deal lately, and has on that account been more friendly with Jack than he used to be. Now, if he gets a note like that, in handwriting he can't tell from Jack's to

save him, he'll go right into the air. The first thing he'll do will be to jump on Jack. Either that, or he'll sulk and say nothing and refuse to go to Highland with the nine. I can get that to him this evening, for I know a boy who'll carry it and do all the lying that's necessary if he's well paid for the job."

"Just the thing," said Rand, cheerfully. "If it will work."

"Well, it's the best I can think of."

"But it's forgery, you know."

"Hang the forgery! I'll risk that. If it's detected, I'll simply say I did it as a joke."

"All right; try it. And give me that drug."

He looked at his watch.

"I've got to be starting for home pretty soon."

Reel went to a closet and pulled out his grip, and took from a case in it a small bottle of colorless liquid.

"If you can dope his ice cream or his coffee or anything else with this it will make Lafe so sick he'll think he's going to die, but it won't hurt him a particle otherwise."

He secured a small phial and turned a few drops of the liquid into it.

"Half of that is enough for the work."

They talked for a few minutes longer after Rand had tucked the phial safely away in his pocket; and then they went down to the street together.

CHAPTER V.

HOW IT WORKED OUT.

That same evening a boy brought a note to Phil Kirtland, and the servant who received it at the door took it up to Phil's room.

"No answer," said the servant, and promptly retreated.

Phil thought he recognized Jack's writing on the envelope, and when he opened it and read the note the blood rushed in a hot wave to his face.

"Why, the puppy!" he exclaimed.

Phil had just returned from a visit to Daisy Lightfoot, and as she was not feeling very well and so had not seemed as lively as usual, a thing Phil had noticed, that fact chimed in very well with the statements of this note, making it seem possible, and even probable, that Daisy had been bored by his company.

The thought even struck him now that she might have asked Jack to write it.

Throwing it from him, he sprang up and walked nervously about the room.

That note had come like an unexpected blow in the

face. And Phil was high-strung and sensitive. Hence, it hurt him beyond measure, and humiliated him more than words can tell. Ordinarily, Phil was not a fellow who would intrude his company where it was not desired. But Daisy Lightfoot had seemed pleased with his company.

After walking nervously about the room, Phil came back to his chair, sat down, and took up the note to re-read it.

"Well, I'll certainly not go there again," was his thought, "if she doesn't want me to; but why didn't *she* speak about it, instead of Jack?"

His humiliation and his anger grew side by side.

Finally he left the room, and, not seeing the servant, went down into the hall.

"See here, Plympton," he said, when he found the servant, "who gave you this note?"

"It was brought by a boy; I didn't notice who he was. He said there'd be no answer."

Phil went back up the stairs, fuming.

"Why, I'm as good as Jack Lightfoot! This is an insult! I'll see him about this, and I'll find out if Daisy really thinks as he does. I can stay away from there, all right, if she wants it."

Yet he was hurt—cut to the quick, for he liked Daisy Lightfoot.

At one moment he was half resolved to go down to Jack's and call him out, and ask him why he had sent the note; the next moment he was in the humor to say nothing, but to stay away from the house; and only explain if he was questioned by Daisy.

"But, of course, she'd never say a word, if she got Jack to write this. I don't believe she asked him to write it—don't believe she knows anything about it. And if she doesn't, if he wrote it without consulting her, it was a contemptible thing to do."

In his distress and anger Phil went out into the street, with the note tucked in his pocket. He did not know what course he would pursue; but he was in a suffocating mood, and the house felt so hot and stuffy he could not stay in it.

All thought of the ball game to be played the next day had been driven out of his mind. He thought only of Daisy Lightfoot, wondering chiefly if she knew anything of that note, and if his company really had been distasteful to her.

"I don't believe she knows anything about it," he declared, over and over; "it's just some of Jack's domineering. He runs everything, or tries to; and I suppose he thinks it's his business to dictate who shall call on his sister. It would be just like him."

In this mood Phil found himself moving in the direction of the Lightfoot home, without really having made up his mind that he would call there when he came to it.

As he turned down the street that led to Jack's, he saw a form before him, and drew up stiffly, with his heart jumping.

"Hello, Lightfoot!" he called. "Just a word with you!"

He thought it was Jack.

As a matter of fact, it was Avery Rand, who had loafed down that way after departing from Reel Snodgrass.

When he heard those footsteps behind him and the words, Avery knew that the speaker was Phil Kirtland, for he had met Phil several times and was reasonably well acquainted with him.

He slowed his pace, but did not answer Phil's greeting.

Phil came up hurriedly, his heart now flaming with anger, for he had about convinced himself that Jack had written the note without his sister's knowledge. He did not intend to quarrel with Jack, if he could help it; but he did mean to ask him, as quietly as he could, why he had sent so insulting a thing.

"That was rather small of you, Lightfoot, don't you think?" he demanded. "Why didn't you come to me like a man?"

Smack!

Rand had whirled and landed a blow straight in Phil Kirtland's face.

Two things had moved Rand, in doing this.

It occurred to him that here was a good chance to put the substitute pitcher out of business, by beating him to a pulp there in that dark street; which, by taking Phil by surprise in that way and getting in the first blow, he believed he could do.

The second thought was that if he could knock Phil down and give him a good thumping and then escape, leaving Phil to believe that it was Jack's work, the row which Reel had planned should occur between Jack and Phil would be on in great shape.

Avery Rand might have taken a different view of the possible consequences if he had been given time to think; but he had to act quickly or not at all, and he followed the first impulse that came to him.

Phil fell back against the fence, but saved himself from a tumble to the ground by grasping the palings.

That stinging blow had fairly blinded him, and the blood of hot rage now sang in his ears.

"You contemptible hound!" he screamed.

Rand was coming for him again, and drove a second blow at Phil's face.

Phil was now too mad with rage to see who his assailant was, and the light was also poor; he simply thought it was Jack, and he was as wild as an insane man.

He dodged the blow aimed at his face, receiving it on his shoulder; then, with a scream of crazy anger bubbling from his lips, he leaped at Rand, and struck like a battering-ram.

Rand got a portion of the force of that blow on the shoulder, and it fairly knocked him backward.

He threw up his arm as a guard, for Phil was striking again; but the next blow caught him on the cheek and cut to the blood.

Rand dodged and ducked now, and scampered backward along the sidewalk, with Phil following him.

"You struck me first, you puppy!" Phil shouted, as he thus pursued.

Rand saw that he had caught a Tartar.

He stopped, when Phil had chased him as far as the corner.

"Don't come any further!" he warned, putting up his arms.

If Phil had not been in such a torrent of passion he might have noticed now that this was not the voice of Jack Lightfoot.

"Take that, you whelp!" he screamed, and swung at Rand again.

Rand stepped backward, evading the blow; and then came at Phil, striking wildly.

Phil warded off the blows, and almost laughed as he did so; then, finding an opening, he smashed his right into Rand's face, believing all the while that he was fighting Jack Lightfoot.

It was a knockout blow, and Rand went over backward, hitting his head on the brick pavement.

He lay for a moment stunned; then began to get on his feet.

"Let up!" he begged, seeing his danger. "I—I——"

Phil was coming at him again; his rage was still beating within him like a churning volume of molten lava. He was, in truth, at the moment hardly responsible for what he did.

"Don't strike me again!" Rand begged, putting up his hands. "I—I thought it was—was some one else."

"Oh, you did?" was the scornful answer.

Phil stood before him, panting.

"You—you don't know who I am, do you?" said Rand, trembling.

Phil bent forward to look, noticing now for the first

time that the voice had not the sound and quality he had expected.

Then he trembled, as if he had been stricken with shaking palsy, for he saw that the young fellow before him was not Jack Lightfoot. The discovery was bewildering.

"You're—you're not——"

"Who did you think I was, anyway?"

"Who did you think I was?" was Phil's counter query.

"I—I thought you were a—a footpad—some one who was going to try to rob me; I—I just came down from the—the station—and I—I had some money—and——"

Phil peered into Rand's face, as Rand climbed heavily to his feet.

"Hello! Why, you're from Highland! You're Rand!"

"Yes," Rand sputtered; "yes—I'm Rand, from Highland. I was just ready to go home, and——"

"Why did you strike me?" Phil demanded, angrily.

"I've told you," said Rand, stubbornly. "You were following me, and I thought you were a footpad."

Phil laughed, from the reaction; it was a nervous laugh, without any sense of humor in it.

"Well, that's a joke," he said, still trembling. "I don't know who it's on, though; both of us, I guess. I thought you were another fellow, and you took me for a thief. But didn't you hear me speak to you?"

"Yes, but I didn't understand what you said," was the glib lie. "I thought you asked me to stop."

"And you stopped and handed me one."

Phil put his hand to his face, where that spot still stung and thumped with the beating of his quick pulse.

"Well, this is the worst ever," he confessed. "I beg your pardon, Rand! Hope I didn't hurt you."

"You split my face open, when you struck me that last time," said Rand, applying a handkerchief and bringing it away red with blood. "You hit as hard as a mule could kick."

Phil laughed again, nervously, though he rather liked the compliment.

"I'll admit I hit as hard as I could. But I think you'd have done the same, if in my place. Were you going anywhere, when you came down here?"

"No, no place; just walking about. I guess I'll go uptown. I may need to get a doctor to look at this."

Phil's wits began to come back to him, and with their return he began to grow suspicious.

"You didn't walk down this way to see Jack Lightfoot?"

"No, of course not."

"And you didn't think I was Jack Lightfoot?"

Rand affected indignation.

"I've told you that I thought you were some one who wanted my roll."

Phil swung round on the sidewalk and looked in the direction of the Lightfoot home. The hour was growing late, and he saw no lights there.

"I'll go uptown with you, and if you want a doctor I can take you to one."

But when they had gone a short distance Rand declared that he would not need the services of a doctor, and that he must start for Highland as soon as he could.

Phil did not go back toward Jack Lightfoot's, but walked on home.

"I believe that fellow was looking for Jack," was his conclusion.

CHAPTER VI.

JACK LIGHTFOOT'S DECISION.

The next morning Phil Kirtland went down to Jack's house and called him out.

Phil was a bit nervous, and showed it. That note rested in his pocket.

As Jack came out in answer to Phil's summons, he noticed the flushed look of Phil's face, and anticipated that there was something wrong, for he had had a good deal of trouble with him through the season.

But to-day was the date of the ball game with Highland. Everything depended on the winning of that game—their chance for the pennant rested on it.

Hence, Jack had already decided that nothing should make him do or say a word that would spoil the harmony now existing in the nine.

So, though he saw Phil's flushed face and felt that something unpleasant was probably in store, he hardened this decision, a thing necessary for him to do, for Jack was a youth of quick temper, which blazed out sometimes like a sudden fire.

"Hello, Phil!" he said, kindly, as he met Phil at the gate.

Phil's face seemed to grow redder.

"You notice my beauty spot?" he remarked, trying to laugh, as he and Jack walked away from the gate together toward the outskirts of the town. He tapped the bluish spot on his cheek—a souvenir of that blow, of which he had not been able to rid himself.

"Why, what does that mean?" Jack asked, with sympathy.

"I thought last night that you gave me that!"

"What?"

"I thought so at first, when the blow landed; but I found out, after I'd licked the fellow, that it was Avery Rand, of Highland."

Phil could not hide his gratification; and he had a right to feel gratified by the manner in which he had met Rand's cowardly assault.

"He attacked you?" Jack cried.

"Sure thing; right up there beyond the alley, as I was walking down this way. It was dark. I thought it was you, and called to him, and when I came up he handed me that."

He again put his fingers tenderly on the bruised spot.

"Well, then, we had it hammer and tongs; and I gave him, I think, more than he'd bargained for."

"Why in the world did he hit you?"

"He said he thought I was a sneak thief; but he lied, and I believe now that he thought he was attacking you. It was near your house, you see, and he was loafing by there, probably hoping you'd come along. Well, he certainly got what was coming to him!"

Jack was naturally overwhelmed with surprise, but when he had talked it over with Phil, he was about of Phil's opinion, that Rand had probably meant to knock him down and "beat him to a pulp," so that he would be useless in the game against Highland.

That the thing had turned out as it did, and that Phil had been the one to meet and thwart the thing, was gratifying. It had pleased Phil, and Jack thought it would make Phil the more determined in his work against the Highland nine that day.

"But there's another thing," said Phil, flushing violently.

Jack saw that hot flush with some uneasiness.

It made him fear what was coming, but again he hardened his decision to do nothing and say nothing, no matter what the provocation, that would tend to make trouble between himself and Phil, for he valued Phil's work on the diamond, and that game must be won.

Phil faced round toward him, trembling, and took the envelope out of his pocket.

"Lightfoot, I didn't think you'd be sneak enough to do that—send a note of that kind to me in a cowardly manner, by a boy who ran away like a cur as soon as he'd delivered it! Of course, if your sister feels that way, it's all right, and I shan't trouble her with my company, but——"

Jack's heart had jumped under those words, and his face, too, had flushed to a deep red.

Yet he still remembered his decision, to permit nothing to provoke him to a quarrel that day with Phil; and he didn't comprehend what Phil was talking about.

At the same time he stared at the envelope which Phil had produced, for his own handwriting seemed to be on it.

"I don't know what you mean?" he urged, keeping his voice down.

"Why, just that!" Phil snapped, jerking the envelope open and tearing out the note, which he thrust at Jack. "That was cowardly! You sent that insulting note last night to me, by a secret messenger, who sneaked away as soon as he'd delivered it!"

"Why, I didn't send you any note at all!"

"Didn't you send me that note last evening?"

"Certainly not."

Jack took the note and opened it, and saw what Reel Snodgrass had written.

He was thunderstruck.

"You sent me that last evening!" said Phil, trembling.

Jack looked at him steadily.

"Phil, on my honor, I never wrote that, and don't know anything about it?"

"What?"

"That's the truth!"

"Then who did write it?"

"I don't know."

"It's your handwriting!"

"It looks like it, but it isn't mine, for I never wrote it."

Phil stared at him in surprise.

"Do you mean that?—honest, do you mean that?"

At any other time the tone of doubt would have stirred Jack's quick temper into a blaze. But he remembered his decision.

"I mean it, honest. Why, Phil, that's a base forgery!"

"Then, what does it mean?"

Phil was bewildered; he had been so sure that Jack had written the note.

"Some contemptible trick, to make us enemies, perhaps. But I didn't write it, Phil, and we're not going to be enemies; we're going to try to be friends, you understand."

Phil took the note in his shaking fingers and stared at it. It resembled Jack's handwriting remarkably, and he was wondering if Jack could have written it,

and, changing his mind, now thought to lie out of it. But—that would not be like Jack Lightfoot.

With these thoughts were mixed, of course, thoughts of Daisy Lightfoot. And Phil began to wish he had not been so precipitate and so stormy with his words.

Jack had been doing some thinking—wondering who had written that note, and he was wondering, too, what Daisy would think about it. Phil was beginning to feel chagrined and ashamed of the whole thing. He began to feel that he had belittled himself.

"Jack," he urged, "if you didn't write that—and I'm bound to believe that you didn't and that it's a forgery—I'm sorry I showed it to you, or said anything about it. You'll understand why. But I thought you wrote it, and—well, it hurt me, and that's a fact!"

"It's outrageous!" cried Jack. "It's an outrage on both of us!"

"But who would do such a thing?" Phil queried, as if he still doubted. "Who would be able to make so good a forgery or your handwriting? And why would he want to? There must be a motive back of it."

"There is," Jack agreed, "and I'll find out about it, if it can be done."

Phil put the note in his pocket.

"You—you won't say anything about this to Daisy?" he said, hesitating.

"If you say not, I'll never mention it to her."

"Well, you see, if it's spoken of, I'd rather do the telling myself; you can understand why."

"I think I understand; yes."

They walked on together, neither speaking for a moment or two.

"Phil," said Jack, "you and I have had our troubles, which it's not necessary to speak of now, but I'm trying to forget them, and I want you to do the same. It strikes me that this was written through jealousy, or by some one who wanted to stir up trouble between us. I'm glad you came straight to me with it, and so gave me a chance to deny it."

"You think some one wanted to make trouble between us?"

"Well, now, think it over: If Rand's attack was for the purpose of eliminating you or I from the game to-day, this might have been sent for some such reason, too. Some one might have wanted to get us at loggerheads, hoping that it would hurt the game."

Again they walked on in silence.

"Jack, since the time I played an academy nine against a nine you picked from the high school, last spring, haven't I been fair and square? I told you, then, that if you defeated me I'd stop kicking about

you being captain of the Cranford nine, and that Brodie and I would stay in the nine and do all we could to help Cranford to win. We've done that, haven't we?"

"You have; you've done the fair thing."

"That's all; only I wanted to hear you say it."

When they came back Phil seemed in an amiable mood, though he was still nervous; Jack's spirit of kindness, and his sturdy resolution to fight down anything and everything that might start a fire of anger and insubordination that day had won, and when he and Phil separated at the gate, and Phil went on up-town, there was in Phil's face a wholly different light.

Shortly before the nine got ready to move against Highland Phil came to Jack again.

"Jack," he said, "Brodie and I are going into the game this afternoon to win—we'll play for blood, as you'll see! And if we don't win, it won't be our fault."

And that was the spirit that animated the whole nine, as they set out for Highland.

Reel's shot had overreached the mark, and its result had been to fire the heart of Phil Kirtland against the Highlanders and against the secret enemy who had sent that note, and to make him determined to play against Highland that afternoon as he had never played in his life.

Jack had never led his nine to any ball field when they were more thoroughly united and determined.

It augured well for the result of the game.

CHAPTER VII.

"PLAY BALL."

Lafe Lampton had apparently at last fallen a victim to his appetite; for, after having his usual luncheon that day at the Highland restaurant, he was taken violently ill.

Before the hour for the game he improved a little and insisted on being taken to the ball grounds, saying he believed he could pull himself together and go behind the bat.

While Lafe was being taken to the grounds in a carriage, Fighting Saul Messenger stumbled upon some fellows who looked to be hoboes, and found Avery Rand conferring with them.

This was out behind the ball-ground fence.

Rand left the hoboes as soon as he observed Saul, and entered the grounds.

Seeing Saul staring at them, the hoboes separated hastily and disappeared.

"Well, now, what did that mean?" Saul asked him-

self. "Some more fellows are being hired to do up the nine or the umpire. I wish I could have slipped nearer and heard something."

When he met Jack he reported the matter, and was told by Jack to keep his eyes open.

Though Lafe was anxious to go behind the bat, he gave up just before the game was called, and, as Reel Snodgrass had anticipated, Phil Kirtland donned the pad and mask, at Jack's request, and became a part of the Cranford battery.

The Highlanders were now jubilant, for, though Avery Rand had thought it wise to keep his own counsel for the present, and therefore they knew nothing of his scheme to put Lafe on the shelf, it pleased them to have so good a catcher as Lafe eliminated.

"Kirtland's pretty good," Jack overheard Kit Carver saying, "but he isn't Lafe Lampton."

Jack had an earnest talk with Phil before the game opened.

"I'm going to trust all the signal work to you," he said. "You can see the whole field, you know, and you're quick and have a good head. Remember, we've got to win out to-day!"

This was to a certain extent a stroke of policy on Jack's part, for it flattered Kirtland's pride; yet it was sound baseball wisdom, too, as the catcher is the one who should look out for the signaling and for what is occurring on and beyond the diamond. The pitcher's back is to the field, but the catcher faces it and can see every movement of the runners and fielders.

A great crowd had come out to witness the game, for it was known that it was the last game in which Cranford and Highland were to cross bats this season, and that the winning of it meant almost everything to the fortunate nine.

Cranford had sent over a band of shouting rooters, who sang songs to cheer the nine, and were generous with their applause even when, as sometimes happened, there was not much to applaud.

The Cranford girls were there, also—Daisy Lightfoot, Kate Strawn, Nellie Conner and a dozen others; and they sat in the grand stand, with a group of enthusiastic Cranford people, waving flags and cheering with the others.

Saul Messenger—Fighting Saul—had taken possession of the Scotch collie, Rex—who was, as usual, strung with ribbons—and kept the dog near him.

Saul believed that there was wolf blood in Rex, for Rex had shown that he could fight like a wolf, or a bulldog, on occasion.

The boys said that there was certainly "wolf blood" in Fighting Saul.

Remembering the assault made on Phil in the previous game played at Highland, Saul was keeping his weather eye open for any signs of such a thing again. In addition, all the boys were suspicious and watchful, in view of the attack by Avery Rand on Phil the night before in Cranford.

Saul had promised to "hammer" the fellow who made the first move toward any Cranford player or the umpire; and there was no doubt that Fighting Saul would "make good," if the chance but came his way.

Happiest of all there, apparently, was little Nat Kimball, for to him had been confided the old mascot, "Polly."

He sat in the benches with the other players, with Polly hoisted on his shoulder.

This was after the Cranford nine and substitutes had mixed "war medicine" by marching in howling procession round the rubber, where Polly, hoisted on the end of Old Wagon Tongue, had "whooped it up" for them in great shape.

This performance had been "as good as a circus" to most of the spectators, and brought thunderous applause.

And somehow—it seems strange to say that it should!—it had filled the hearts of the Cranford boys to the brim with fighting enthusiasm.

Sandy McLean smiled one of his wide smiles, that reddened his sandy face and almost hid the fine, thin lines that stood for eyebrows, as he broke open the Spalding box and took out the new, white ball, which he held up daintily between thumb and fingers, before throwing it to the pitcher.

Sandy was to umpire that day, and he was in his element.

Highland was at the bat, with Jack in the pitcher's place and Phil Kirtland looking through the bars of the catcher's mask, when the white ball shot out of Sandy's hands, while the people howled their joy, and the game opened up.

This was the batting order:

HIGHLAND.

Perlie Hyatt, cf.
Avery Rand, 1st b.
Tom Johnson, 3d b.
Bill Miller, lf.
Kit Carver, p.
Ben Yates, rf.
Link Porter, ss.
Phin Hester, 2d b.
Cale Young, c.

CRANFORD.

Tom Lightfoot, 2d b.
Brodie Strawn, 1st b.
Mack Remington, rf.
Phil Kirtland, c.
Ned Skeen, ss.
Connie Lynch, 3d b.
Wilson Crane, cf.
Jubal Marlin, lf.
Jack Lightfoot, p.

Jack struck out the first man up, but Avery Rand,

whose face still showed traces of the hitting ability of Phil Kirtland, secured a single.

Perhaps Rand distrusted the ability of Phil Kirtland. At any rate, he led out from first, as the ball came from the pitcher, and when it struck in Phil's mitt he was well out, as if he meant to steal second.

He hesitated there, for just an instant; yet it was fatal, for, with a snap throw from the wrist, Phil sent the sphere whizzing to Brodie on first.

Instead of taking chances to go to second, Rand tried to get back to first bag, but he was too slow, for Brodie had the ball.

The cheer which greeted this performance brought a flush to Phil's face, and he waved his hand airily in his habitual way to the Cranford girls in the grand stand when he saw the enthusiastic fluttering of their little flags.

"Good work!" said Jack.

It was not until the fourth inning, when Cranford had three runs and Highland two, that a chance came for Highland to register a solid kick against Sandy McLean.

Wilson Crane had come sailing home along the third base line, running as only Wilson could run, and then throwing himself in a great slide at the plate, just as the ball came into the mitt of Cale Young and he leaped with a diving motion and put it against Wilson's shoulder.

"Out!" roared the Highland fans, standing up and screaming the word.

Sandy McLean had hovered by the plate, stooping and squinting.

Now he stood erect, and swept out his right hand in a bland gesture.

"You're all right!" he said, to Wilson.

The Cranford fans cheered, and the Cranford mascot "hurrahed."

It was another run for Cranford.

The Highland players and fans went into the air.

Cale Young swore a great oath at Sandy, and Kit Carver and the infielders came swarming in, making the air blue with their vociferations.

Jack smiled, as he saw Saul Messenger thrusting his shock of yellow hair and his burning eyes into the midst of this mass of screaming protestants, ready for a fight if anybody jumped Sandy McLean.

"Go back to your places," said Sandy, sturdily.

"But we protest against that decision!" yelled Carver.

"Protests don't go here; when I make a decision it

stands. I was right here and saw what I saw. Go back to your places."

Sandy McLean's face had grown red again and the sandy lines of his eyebrows had lost themselves in the crimson.

Kit Carver and his crowd retreated, finally, but they continued to grumble, and at every chance they raised a kick.

In the fifth inning another storm of protest arose against the umpire's decision, when he declared a batter out on a ball which was driven into center and caught by Wilson Crane.

Wilson had to run in to get the ball, and he took it by a jumping dive just above the ground.

The Highlanders asserted that he picked it up, but McLean decided that it was a fair catch and ordered the batter out, though he had gone to first and claimed to be safe.

Wilson came in from outfield while the howling Highlanders surrounded the umpire.

"I caught that ball!" he shouted, indignantly, thrusting his long nose into the crowd.

"Oh, you'd catch it all right, if it had gone into a well and you had to scoop it up with a net!" one of the Highlanders shouted back at him.

Again Saul Messenger was on hand, leading the colie by a string, and he was spoiling for a fight.

But the fight Saul hoped for did not come, for Sandy stood to his guns and the Highland players again went angrily to their places.

Yet they had no reason to grumble. They had brought in two runs in that inning, and were now tied with Cranford, and one of those runs had been given on a decision which it seemed to the Cranford boys favored the Highlanders. But that was not enough. Highland was fighting for that game, and they hoped to win out by intimidating the umpire, if they could not win in any other way.

But Sandy McLean was not an umpire who could be intimidated, as he showed by threatening to lay off Kit Carver, the pitcher, if he gave him any more of his "slack."

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT OLD CHESTNUT OF "PLAYING AGAINST TEN MEN."

When, in the sixth inning, another close decision went against them, the Highlanders raised that old chestnut cry of "playing against ten men."

They must have known that the umpire was not

favoring anybody, but they apparently tried to make themselves and the spectators believe that he was leaning toward Cranford all the time.

When they lifted that cry the Highland fans took the cue and began to tell Sandy that he had "a bum eye," that he couldn't see anything but "strikes" when Jack was in the pitcher's place and nothing but "balls" when Carver was carving the corners, that he "wore green glasses," and many other unpleasant things, all tending to irritate him.

As a usual thing Sandy held in his temper pretty well, but now he turned to the bleachers, with his light gray eyes blazing and the thin lines of his eyebrows sunk into the red of his face, and yelled, dramatically:

"Howl, you dogs! Howl! But I'm the umpire of this game, and don't you fail to remember it; and my decisions stand!"

He turned back to the "kicking" players, his eyes still flashing.

"Go back to your places!" he yelled. "I'm umpiring this game, and I haven't asked for any assistance. The next man that comes up to me shaking his fist in my face and declaring that I'm a thief and a liar goes out of the game!"

The very ferocity of his manner cowed the Highlanders for the time.

But up in the bleachers, and in the grand stand, the fans continued to scream "thief," and "robber," and other epithets at him. And they asked him how much he had received for "selling out to Cranford," and threatened to "do him up" when the game was over.

In the seventh inning Cranford was still in the lead, the score then being seven for Cranford and five for Highland.

When the eighth inning opened, Perlie Hyatt, the head of the batting list, again became the first stick wielder.

Jack sent an out-shoot, which he was sure crossed the corner of the plate, but the umpire announced it a "ball."

Then Phil signaled for one close in, and Hyatt, throwing himself into it, as Jack believed, was given first.

Jack almost began to fear now that the continued howling of the Highland fans was having its effect on Sandy; for it can be seen that even the fairest umpire does not want the spectators to think he is not giving any nine a square deal. It began to seem to Jack that Sandy, in his desire to be "fair" to Highland, was now actually favoring the others.

Nevertheless, when Hyatt tried to steal second, and

Phil Kirtland sent the ball whistling to Tom Lightfoot to cut him off, and did so, the Highland fans again yelled "robber," and "thief," and some even went so far as to rise in their places, as if they meant to come down into the diamond and settle the matter with the umpire according to the rules of the prize ring.

Once more Fighting Saul's shock of yellow hair was seen near the center of disturbance. It was like the white plume of Henry of Navarre, always seen where the fight was thickest or promised to rage hottest.

"The runner is out!" yelled Sandy, repeating his decision; and, after clinging to the bag as long as he could, seeming for a time determined to stay there, Hyatt came reluctantly back to the benches, where the other members of the nine and substitutes were "chewing the rag."

"Good work, Phil!" said Jack; and Phil Kirtland waved his hand.

In truth, it was good work, and Phil deserved all credit for his quickness and good throwing.

Avery Rand now struck out.

Tom Johnson, a heavy batter, let two strikes be called against him, then lifted one of Jack's drops and sent it over into left field.

Jubal let the ball go-through his fingers; but, when Johnson tried to gather in second bag on it, the Yankee lad lined the horsehide like a bullet to Tom Lightfoot.

Tom leaped into the air, caught it, and, whirling as his feet touched the ground, he tagged the runner.

"Out on second!" said Sandy McLean.

The frothing fans in the bleachers, who had been calling Sandy McLean a robber, came scrambling down now and out toward him.

He faced them like a lion at bay attacked by a band of snarling and snapping jackals.

"We'll settle with you!" yelled the foremost, making a lunge at Sandy.

Crack!

Fighting Saul was on hand, and his hard fist tumbled the man backward.

The Cranford boys now swarmed out to protect Saul and the umpire, and for a minute it looked as if a fight of as large proportions as had taken place in the previous game was scheduled for immediate delivery.

But the fiery fan who had been knocked down was dragged back by his friends, who saw what was coming if they persisted, and after a lot of "hot air" the thing simmered down again.

But they still continued to howl at McLean, and to shout that he had joined the Cranford nine, and that

the Highland boys had "no show" so long as they were forced to "play against ten men."

Two of the Highland players were out, when Bill Miller came to the bat; and it began to seem that Jack would strike him out and retire the side.

But one of those strange "accidents" that are due about so often in a game of baseball, and which make things interesting and keep the spectators guessing, came waltzing along now; for, when it seemed that the third strike would be made, Miller connected, and slammed a great liner against the ball-ground fence.

The Highland fans rose *en masse*, yelling as if they would burst their lungs, as Wilson Crane sprinted after that ball, which had gone over his head, and Miller was flying along fairly tearing up the bases.

He reached third before Wilson could field in the ball.

Then Kit Carver, the Highland pitcher, picked up the bat, as his name was called by the umpire.

That great three-bagger had "rattled" Jack. His face had gone to a brick-dust red and his eyes began to glitter feverishly.

"Steady, old boy!" called Lafe from the benches, when he saw this.

Jack tried to steady down.

Then Kirtland, who also seemed to have been made nervous, let one of Jack's hot throws slip through his fingers.

Miller came home, with the fans howling.

Carver now cracked out a two-bagger, and was followed by Ben Yates with a single.

With a runner on first and on third, Carver began to lead out daringly from third, to give the runner at first a chance to take second, or tease Phil into throwing to second and thus give the runner at third a chance to come in.

Phil steadied down and did not fall into the trap; and even let the runner from first go to second rather than risk letting Carver come home.

Then Jack again failed to "make good," and the bases were filled.

The Highland fans were screaming.

They had forgotten to howl at Sandy McLean.

"Steady, old boy!" Lafe warned, when he saw Jack's red face grow apparently redder.

Again Phil let a wild pitch get by him, and Carver came home, while the other runners advanced themselves each a bag.

Two runs had been brought in, after two men were out.

"Keep it going!" yelled Carver.

They "kept it going," for Jack now went into the air, and both runners gained home, while another man was advanced to second.

But the run getting stopped there.

Yet how had the face of things been changed!

Highland was now two runs ahead—the score standing nine to seven in their favor.

But the Cranford boys "pulled themselves together" in the second half, and made it a tie—nine to nine.

And then the ninth inning opened, with the excitement at fever pitch.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NINTH INNING.

The thing that had happened was discouraging enough, and the manner in which Jack had "gone up in a balloon," was personally humiliating.

Yet the fact that in their half of the eighth inning the Cranford nine had brought in two runs and tied the score had some features of encouragement. In a case of this kind it sometimes happens that the poorer elements of a team come to the front and play the game for a rally.

And Jack was given time to think it over and to "cool down," while that half of the inning was being played, for he did not come to the bat, but sat in the benches and saw other members of the team wield the stick and bring in those two runs.

The thought that their hopes for the pennant hung on the work to be done in the next inning enabled him to pull his courage together.

He saw that the Cranford nine had still as good hopes as Highland; in fact, their chance seemed to be better, for, up to the time that the "accident" occurred which started those humiliating plays by which Highland had pulled four men across the rubber, Cranford had played the best ball.

So Jack saw that the chances were still with Cranford, and he would not let himself give way to the feelings that threatened to swamp his courage and make him unable to do good work.

That few minutes of cool thought in the benches did

worlds of good for him, and he had recovered his equanimity and his nerve before Cranford's half of the eighth inning ended.

Then a thing happened which fairly flooded his soul with hope and fighting enthusiasm.

Lafe leaned toward him in the benches and said:

"Jack, I'm going behind the bat!"

Phil was a good catcher, but he was not Lafe Lampton. If Lafe could play! Jack could have shouted.

"But are you able?" he asked, anxiously—so anxiously that he almost trembled.

Lafe smiled.

"I've just been trying 'em, and I find they taste good, and that's a sure sign with me!"

The smile broadened, as he pulled out a peanut and clapped the knernels into his mouth.

Jack had often censured Lafe for his piglike appetite, but when he saw that he could have hugged Lafe, he was so delighted.

"I was sick enough to die for a while," said Lafe; "but it has all passed now, and I'm good for one inning, anyway. I'm going to try it. We've got to win this game!"

"We must win it!"

"That's the ticket; and you and I can do it."

Lafe was not a boaster—never was; it was just the expression of his honest belief.

Phil flushed when Jack told him that Lafe had asked to be put behind the bat in the ninth inning; yet, if he felt touched, and his face showed that he did, he contrived to keep his feelings out of sight otherwise.

A wild yell went up from the Cranford fans and the nine when Lafe Lampton donned pad and mask, and, after a word with Jack, went into position.

Little Nat stood up, with Polly on his shoulders; and, lifting her to the tips of his fingers, he gave an Indian war whoop, and Polly, seated thus, and excited by Nat's yell, cackled out her old cry, taught her long before by Jubal Marlin:

"Ha! ha! ha! Hah! hah! hah! Haw! haw! haw! Hip, hip, hip, hooray, hooroar, hooroar! Hurrah for Cranford! Hurrah for Jack Lightfoot! Hip, hip, hooroar—hooroar!"

Then the flags fluttered and the Cranford yell again

banged to the sky from bleachers and grand stand, and the Cranford fans began to sing:

"We're bound to do up Highland, in the battle of to-day!
For we are marching on!

"Glory, glory, halleluyah!" etc.

Phil had gone back to his old place at third base, retiring Connie Lynch to the benches among the substitutes.

Then the ninth inning opened, with Polly squawking and the fans singing, and Jack Lightfoot, with his courage good now and his resolution hardened into a determination to do or die, sent in the first pitched ball of the ninth.

Avery Rand was again at the bat, and Jack now had the supreme satisfaction of striking him out, a performance that brought more yells from the fans and more "hurrahing" from Polly.

Tom Johnson, the best batter for Highland, came next, and he was a hard man to handle—a hard proposition for any pitcher.

Johnson was a "waiter." Jack tried him with out-curves and drops in front of the plate, alternating with the swift spit ball; and had one strike and three balls called.

Again Jack tried the spit ball, with that down-shoot just before it came up to the rubber.

It was a very hard ball to get, but—Johnson got it, and he lifted it into the left field, where Jubal was crouching in position.

It seemed a bad start, for Johnson took two bags on that hit.

"Bill Miller at the bat!" called Sandy McLean.

Jack tried the spit ball again, alternating it with ordinary slow and swift curves, and Bill Miller went the way of Avery Rand—he struck out.

Two men were out, and but one man had secured a hit—Tom Johnson, who was on second and crazy to be on his way to third.

"Kit Carver at the bat!"

Sandy had called the next name on the batting list.

Kit Carver knew that this was a critical time, and he could not escape a share of nervousness.

With two men out and the score tied, and this the Highland half of the ninth inning, it was clearly "up to" Carver to do something.

Carver was a good player and a good batter, but he was noticeably nervous. He struck at the first ball, and made a clear miss.

To encourage him the Highland fans began to cheer.

Little Nat, not to be outdone, popped Polly to his shoulder, where she "hurrahed" for Cranford and Jack Lightfoot.

The excitement of the spectators was as feverish as that of the players themselves, and everywhere, in bleachers and grand stand, men and women were standing up, though yelled at by others to "sit down!"

The spit ball came in once more, and again Carver fanned.

"Two strikes!" shouted Sandy McLean, elevating his voice to make it heard in the midst of the uproar.

Jack Lightfoot felt himself trembling, as he wound up for that third ball.

Lafe had signaled "Steady, old boy;" and his smile could be seen through the bars of the mask.

Crack!

Carver connected.

Every one of the spectators in the seats seemed to rise to his feet as that liner was cracked out, and the yells that went up sounded like a hoarse roar.

It was a two-bagger, and Tom Johnson came home from second.

The Highland nine was a run in the lead now.

"Keep it up!" yelled the Highland players, as Ben Yates went to the bat.

But—it was "strike!" strike!" strike!"

And Yates was out.

The spit ball had done the work.

The Cranford fans fluttered their flags and yelled, and once more Polly whooped things up for the Cranford nine, under the coaxing of Nat Kimball.

"Two runs'll do it, naow!" cried Jubal, with wild enthusiasm. "Gol-darned if I didn't know we'd win, when the parrot come back tew us!"

"We haven't won yet," said Skeen, nervously.

"No, but we're gointer. By granny, I feel's if I could lift that ole ball over the moon."

Jubal was first to the bat; and he went into position with his broad Yankee smile, lugging two bats

and throwing one away as he came to the plate, so that Old Wagon Tongue would seem lighter by comparison.

Jubal was left-handed, and this fact was always an annoyance to a pitcher, for pitchers become more accustomed to throwing to right-handed men.

"Right there, by granny!" said Jubal, holding up his bat and tapping it near the end. "If you'll send it right I'm gointer drive this ball right into the mouth o' the man in the moon."

Jubal always talked that way, smiling down at the pitcher.

Kit Carver began to "carve the corners," as the Highland boys called it; but they were too far out, and Jubal smilingly let them go by.

"This ain't no gol-darned fish pole that I'm handlin'!" he cried. "Gimme somethin' that I can get."

Carver put them closer in; and Jubal, when it seemed he would strike out, lifted one for right field, sending it over the head of the fielder.

Jubal easily took first on that, and started for second, but came back to his perch at first when he saw his danger.

"Jack Lightfoot at the bat!" called Sandy McLean.

Jack could hear his own heart beating as his name was called, and he took up the bat and stepped into position.

Jubal began to dance almost recklessly off from first as if he hoped thereby to "rattle" Carver.

Carver's face was red. He saw what he had to do if he kept Cranford from making a score, and he had to do that now to win out.

Again he sent the balls wide, and had "balls" called against him; which started the Highland fans up again with that old cry of theirs, of "playing against ten men." They yelled in hoodlum tones at the umpire, denouncing his "bum eye," and asking him if he thought he could tell a "strike" if he saw one.

The Cranford fans were again singing, and the parrot was "hurrahing" for Jack and for Cranford.

There were times when this din would have been confusing to Jack.

But he was calm now; he had conquered his trembling nerves by filling his heart with the assurance

that the nine must win; and, though his face looked red, he was not trembling, but lifted the bat with steady hands as the ball came in.

When three "balls" had been called, Carver put it over the rubber.

Jack had been waiting for that.

Crack!

A wild howl broke loose from the throats of the spectators, as the ball shot from the bat and went away into deep center; and Jack, driving Jubal ahead of him, went down to first and on to second, and then on to third.

A pandemonium broke loose the like of which had never been seen on that diamond, when Jubal crossed the rubber and was safe home, with Jack following him.

The ball was coming in, with a great throw from center.

Cale Young, the Highland pitcher, got in position to receive it.

"Slide!" yelled Tom Lightfoot. "Slide—slide!"

Jack pitched headlong at the plate.

"Smack!" went the ball in Young's mitt.

But Jack was there first.

"Safe!" shouted Sandy McLean, amid the denouncing yells of the Highland fans.

Then that hoarse cheer from the Cranford followers broke once more thunderously on the air.

For Cranford had won, and Highland's hopes for the pennant had been trailed in the dust.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOBOES AGAIN.

It was late—after dark, in fact—before the Cranford nine set out for home, in the big wagon that had brought them to Highland.

And they were late because of the "jubilations" they had indulged in after winning that hotly contested game.

They had elevated Polly on the end of Old Wagon Tongue, at the rubber, at the conclusion of the game, and, joined by a host of their friends, they had marched round her while she "hurrahed," and had sung their

"war songs," while the fans, and the girls, led by Lily Livingston, grouped near, cheering and waving their flags.

And Polly had seemed to think all this honor and glory was for her, to judge by the manner in which she fluttered her green wings and "hurrahed" and "hooroared" and yelled for Cranford and for Jack.

After that there had been a parade of the nine down into the town, with Polly on the bat, the bat on Saul Messenger's broad shoulder, and the nine and the fans bringing up the rear.

Jubal had probably never yelled so much and so lustily before at one time in all his life.

What delighted Jack as much as anything else was that Phil Kirtland was in a happy mood, pleased with the winning of the game, and apparently in nowise sore over the fact that Lafe had been placed behind the bat in the ninth inning.

Kirtland had certainly conducted himself rather handsomely that day.

Nearly all of the fans and spectators from Cranford had gone home long before the nine started in their wagon.

They were still in a happy mood, and they sang songs and cracked jokes, and conducted themselves in a noisy manner, as they rumbled along the country roads.

Then one of their horses stumbled and went lame, and the wagon careening into a hole at about the same time, it was discovered that in addition to a lame horse they had a broken wheel.

They sought assistance at the nearest farmhouse; but all the farmer would do was to grant them permission to stable their horses there that night. His own horses were tired, after a day of heavy work, and he would not permit them to be used.

Hence, there was nothing left but for the boys to walk home.

This did not seem so bad at first, even though the distance was considerable; and they continued to sing and "jollify," as they plodded through the darkness over the lonely roads, until, their voices growing hoarse, and their strength being not so great as it had been, they subsided into conversational tones.

Finally they struck the railroad which ran from Cardiff to Cranford, and began to "walk ties," for it offered a more direct route than the highway.

As they thus plodded on, having quieted down, they beheld the sudden flash of a match ahead.

It flared up for but a minute, but it revealed to them the faces of some tramps, who were tugging at something which they appeared to be dragging upon the track.

There was a deep cut at this point, and the peculiarity of what they had beheld aroused the boys' suspicions.

They recalled the hoboes who had been seen at Highland in the afternoon.

All the boys stopped dead still, when they saw that match flare up, which went out as soon as seen, leaving the road there in darkness.

"Do you think they saw us?" Ned Skeen asked nervously.

"Hardly likely," Jack answered. "It's pretty dark here and we weren't making any noise. If they had heard us they wouldn't have struck that light."

"What do you suppose they are up to?" queried Nat.

"They were certainly dragging something upon or across the track."

"By hemlock, seems tew me they may be gointer try tew wreck the next train," said Jubal.

"If you fellows'll stay right here quietly, Tom and I will crawl up on those scamps and try to find out what it means."

"And get yourselves into a pot of trouble!" Lafe objected.

"There'll be no trouble, if we're quiet," said Tom.

The boys sat down, all but Jack and Tom, and these two slipped away along the track.

They used great caution right at the start, and increased this as they drew near the spot where the match had flashed, and heard there a grumbling undertone of voices.

By cautious work Jack and Tom were able to approach to within less than a stone's throw of the men, whom they now knew to be tramps, and no doubt the very ones who had been in Highland.

The tramps were still industriously at work, and were talking among themselves as they labored.

"They're building an obstruction on the track," whispered Jack, as he lay flat down for the purpose of getting the hoboes between himself and the sky line.

"Sure thing," Tom assented.

"And that means they intend to wreck a train."

"It looks it."

They lay still now, listening, and heard disconnected sentences of the talk.

"On de fast freight!" "Dat rich peddler!" "In de caboose!" "A pot o' swag!"

These were some of the things that floated to the boys in concealment.

The place selected by the hoboes for their work was so lonely that they seemed to have no fear of an interruption.

When they had listened a while, Jack and Tom retreated as stealthily as they had advanced, and, reaching a point they deemed safe, they began to discuss the situation in whispers:

"They're going to wreck the fast freight," was Jack's guess.

"Yes."

"I wonder what time it is?"

"That freight is due in Cranford at ten-thirty. I can't see my watch, but it must be ten o'clock, or after."

"Do you suppose that's the peddler we saw in Highland?"

"Shouldn't wonder. Yes, I guess it is. They've found out that he's to be on the fast freight, which will land him in Cranford at ten-thirty, and to-morrow he'll be peddling there. They got onto the fact that he was to go on the fast freight—in the caboose, and they found out, too, that he had a lot of money."

"We'll have to get a move on us."

"That's right, too!"

They retreated again, and as soon as it was safe to hasten they hurried back to where they had left the other members of the nine.

There they related their discoveries and gave their conjectures as to what the hoboes had planned to do.

"The scoundrels!" said Lafe.

"There are a bad lot of tramps visit this section," declared Jack.

He had good cause to know only too well that this was true, for on some previous occasions he had fallen afoul of these thugs and given some rough usage.

"If we had a lantern," said Lafe, "we could stop the train right here."

"It's too far to go back to that farmhouse?" ventured Skeen.

"But we'll have to do something!" Jack urged.

"If you fellows have matches, any of you, I can make a torch all right," said Tom. "There must be some grass of good length growing near here, and dry enough for the purpose, and if I could find a birch tree and get some of the bark and twist it in with the grass it would make a fine light—good enough."

Several of the boys, including Jack, had matches, and Tom skirmished out into the darkness at the side of the road seeking material for an improvised torch.

When he came back, having found the things he wanted, Jack announced to him the conclusion the boys had reached in his absence.

"If we stop the engine here," he said, "it will save the train, but it will let the hoboes get away; and they ought to be pulled, if it can be done."

"What's your plan? We've got very little time, I think."

"We'll try to creep close up to them, and be ready to tackle them as soon as the train sees our signal and before they can get away."

"It will be risky," said Tom.

"Yes, but don't you think it may be worth it, if we can succeed? And you see, even if they get away then, it will be no worse than if we stopped the train here and let them get away; only we'll have the satisfaction of having tried it."

The boys were much excited, for the thing they proposed to attempt now held a big element of danger.

CHAPTER XI.

FOILING THE HOBOS.

The darkness which had held cleared away almost as if a great searchlight had been swept across the sky,

as the boys slipped into position at the side of the track not far away from where the hoboes were still at work.

The banks of cloud which had hid the moon rolled away like a curtain, bringing down upon the earth a flooding moonlight.

Jack and his friends crouched low, doubling themselves close to the ground.

There they lay, and were soon convinced they had not been seen by the tramps.

Then they were confronted by a startling danger, for the tramps, having completed the work of placing an obstruction on the track, came over to that side, and, creeping along, crouched down not six yards from where the boys lay in hiding.

It was almost impossible to speak even in a whisper now without bringing danger of discovery.

But the tramps talked loudly enough—or, so it seemed, in the silence that otherwise reigned.

Jack fancied he could almost hear his heart beating; and he was sure he could hear the suppressed breathing close beside him.

"Good t'ing we got t'rough 'fore de light hit us," one of the tramps grunted, in a thick voice. "Might somebody be comin' along dat crossroads an seen us workin'."

"Funny t'ing 'bout us workin', too!" growled another. "First work I done sense I hit de road, and I don't like it."

"What about dat time when dat farmer made youse saw wood?" came the question.

"And dat time when you was sent to de island?"

They laughed harshly.

Never had Jack and his friends come in contact with such callousness; for here were these men, with that obstruction across the track, which they meant should ditch the train, and perhaps kill some one, yet they could laugh and joke and conduct themselves in that manner.

"Such cattle deserve to be strung up by the neck until they are dead—dead—dead!" Tom whispered, with his lips close to Jack's ear.

Jack pressed his hand against Tom's leg to let him know that he had heard him.

Then Jack slowly and cautiously turned his head.

"You're all ready?" he whispered.

"Yes."

Jack had in his hands the torch which Tom had prepared, and to him had been delegated the duty of lighting this and stopping the train.

With the moonlight shining in that way this promised to be particularly dangerous.

Yet Jack was trusting that the sudden flaring forth of the torch would so scare the scoundrels that their first thought would be to run; and he was, besides, trusting in the fighting qualities of the boys who lay there with him.

Then the rails began to sing, and far away they heard the "too-oot, toot," of the freight at some crossing.

The tramps heard the same thing, and sat up with some attention.

"She's comin'," one of them said, rising and peering down the road.

"Be 'ere in less'n 'steen minutes," grunted another.

Then they lay down again, speaking no more except in grunts that could not be understood by the boys.

The roar of the coming train became distinguishable, and far away, at a bend of the track, they beheld the flash of the headlight.

Jack drew up into a half-sitting posture and got his torch and his match ready. He held the unsulphured end of some other matches in his mouth, for use in case the first failed to go.

The near approach of the fast freight now made the rails begin to "clank," and rumble.

Jack again pressed his hand against Tom's leg, and nudged Lafe, who lay in front of him.

He felt, rather than heard, Lafe gather himself together as if for the coming struggle.

But not a word was spoken.

Then the headlight shot into view down the straight, level stretch of road, and the clanking of the rails and the roar of the train grew louder.

The headlight seemed to bore a bright hole even through the moonlight, but the obstruction had been so placed where shadows were thrown that it was almost certain the engineer would not be able to see it until it was too late.

The engine flashed on toward them, looming large now.

Desperately Jack now scratched his match.

His nerves were shaking.

The match flashed and flared, and he applied it quickly to the torch.

Then, with a wild yell, he leaped out upon the track, and, with the engine thundering toward him, he began to wave the torch.

But he had not moved alone.

Lafe and Tom and the other members of the nine had jumped out into view, being clearly revealed now, and dashed toward the tramps.

The latter had been so taken unawares that they seemed for the moment paralyzed by astonishment.

Then they sprang to their feet.

They tried to run along the track and leap into the bushes, but Lafe and Tom sprang upon two of them, and a lively fight began right there, the tramps struggling to get away, and the two boys endeavoring to make them prisoners.

But the engine was right at hand.

Jack waved his torch wildly, the whistle screamed as if in fear, and the fast freight monster engine slowed up, with a grinding and creaking of brakes.

The tramps whom Tom and Lafe had tackled were desperate now with fear, and they fought like fiends.

The engineer threw himself out of the cab as soon as the engine could be brought to a stop, and came running forward, while further behind came train men, and last of all the peddler whom the tramps had expected to rob.

Jack threw down his torch, and went to the aid of his friends, as the other boys were already doing.

The other tramps had escaped.

But these two, who proved to be the leaders of the dastardly attempt to wreck the train, were brought into subjection, after they had been pretty badly used up.

The excitement of the train men was great, and their indignation was warmly worded, when they beheld that murderous obstruction on the track, and realized what it meant and how near they had come to a disastrous wreck.

For a time it seemed that they would murder the two tramps who had been captured.

But they did not go so far as that.

Ropes were brought from the caboose, and the two hoboos were tied.

Then they were conducted back to the caboose.

The peddler, who was a German Jew, shook with fear, when he understood what the attempted ditching of the train had meant.

"Gootness, mine frients," he expostulated, throwing out his hands in an expressive gesture of fear, "I haf no moneys! Dis pettling is a loosing pizness mit me."

"I guess they would have found your money, all right," said Jack, in answer, "if they had got at you."

The peddler continued to shake, now that the danger was over, as if he were a bag of jelly.

"But I haf no moneys!" he cried; "I cannot bay you for dis great kintness, mine frients."

Then Jack and the other boys laughed.

"Oh, we don't want any pay!" said Jack, to the peddler's relief. "We just did this for fun. We do things like this every night or so, just for the amusement of it."

"But the road will see that you're rewarded, all right," declared the conductor, gratefully. "Never fear for that."

"We're not asking anything," said Jack, sturdily.

The obstruction had been removed from the track, and the fast freight now moved on toward Cranford, the boys riding homeward in the caboose, with the two captured hoboos, and the peddler, who still shook with fear.

And this heroic and successful attempt to prevent the wreck of the fast freight really brought the boys more praise than even their hard and successful fight against the Highland nine that day.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 35, will be "Jack Lightfoot, Pennant Winner; or, Winding up the Four-Town League." In this story is pictured the great game with Tidewater, the last of the series to be played for the pennant of the Four-Town League. It is a number you will not want to miss. You will find in it a great game of baseball, and some other things quite as lively.

A CHAT WITH YOU

Under this general head we purpose each week to sit around the camp fire, and have a heart-to-heart talk with those of our young readers who care to gather there, answering such letters as may reach us asking for information with regard to various healthy sports, both indoor and out. We should also be glad to hear what you think of the leading characters in your favorite publication. It is the editor's desire to make this department one that will be eagerly read from week to week by every admirer of the Jack Lightfoot stories, and prove to be of valuable assistance in building up manly, healthy Sons of America. All letters received will be answered immediately, but may not appear in print under five weeks, owing to the fact that the publication must go to press far in advance of the date of issue. Those who favor us with correspondence will please bear this in mind, and exercise a little patience.

THE EDITOR.

I would like you to tell me if you think my measurements are up to the mark for a boy of twelve. My height, 4 feet 8½ inches; weight, 73 pounds; chest, 27½ inches; waist, 26 inches; hips, 27½ inches; thighs, 15 inches; calf, 9½ inches. If you think my measurements are not right for a boy of my age, I would thank you very much if you would tell me what to do. My ambition to become an athlete is great, and that is the reason I like the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY. ALL-SPORTS is the best book on the market in its line. Wishing success to Jack Lightfoot and his chums, and hoping to see this in print soon, I remain,

CARL M. KORNBLUM.

Evansville, Ind.

You are undersized, Carl, but doubtless the next two years will see a great change in your growth. We have known boys at fourteen to seem stunted, who at seventeen seemed young giants. Don't worry, but continue your athletic training.

I have read nearly all of the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARIES, and think they are about the best weeklies that are published. I like Tom Jack, Lafe, Brodie, and all the rest except Reel Snodgrass and that other cad, Shelton. I like old Jerry, too. Saul Messenger gave Reel all he deserved when he lit into him on the grand stand and smashed his face. I like Nellie and Katie best. I think Lily likes Shelton and Reel too much.

1403 Pendleton Street, Columbia, S. C. HEBER REYNOLDS.

You do us honor, dear Heber, when you go to the trouble of writing in order to tell us how you enjoy reading ALL-SPORTS, and we thank you. Spread the gospel among your boy friends.

I have just finished reading No. 24 of the ALL-SPORTS, and I couldn't keep from writing to you. I have read every number of the ALL-SPORTS, and although I have read a great lot of other books, I think that it is the best set of stories for boys I ever read. My father does not like me to read most books of this style, but he has taken to reading them, and thinks they are a better class than the others. He looks for them as eagerly as I do each week. I intend to read them to the end. I like Jack best; then comes quiet Tom and hungry Lafe, with the others following after. Ben Birkett will probably end up in the pen. Phil Kirtland may turn out as a good friend of Jack's. I don't like Reel S. Of the girls, Nellie Connor takes my eye, and I would like to see Jack have her for his sweetheart. He could, all right. I don't like Lily Livingston. I hope this won't land in the wastebasket.

A NEWTON REPRESENTATIVE.

Newton, Kan.

Your letter has the right ring. We are very much pleased to know your father approves of our little sheet, and we intend that it shall contain nothing at any time that might offend any parent. We hope to have their cooperation in building up a weekly that will stand for everything that is honest and manly in the life of an average, wide-awake, sport loving American lad.

I have just finished No. 23 of ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY. I happened to get hold of four of your books, Nos. 18 and 19, 22 and 23, and am now after the other ones. I have been reading other weeklies, but they don't compare with ALL-SPORTS.

Jack and Tom Lightfoot are heroes of the best type. Next comes Lafe, Skeen, Brodie, Mack, Wilson Crane, Marlin, Saul, Nat, and last, but not least, Connie Mack. I would like to see Connie play third base right along. Kirtland likes praise too well and grumbles too much, but there are worse boys than he. Katie and Nellie are the best girls in the world. I wish that Lily did not interfere with Jack about Delancy Shelton and Reel.

I am the manager of a team of young boys between fourteen and fifteen years of age. Their names and positions are: James C. Hanlon, catcher; Danny Leahy, pitcher; Edward Burke, first base (first sub pitcher); Ben Duatt, second base; Herman Lowell, third base; Mort Warren, shortstop (first sub catcher); Fred Baker, right field (second sub catcher); Clyde Wentworth, left field; Putschard, center field (second sub catcher).

I am 14 years old, 5 feet 2¾ inches in height and weigh 110 pounds. What is the average of a boy of my age? Yours,

H. A. LOWELL.

Your weight is just about right for a lad of your height.

I am a boy of thirteen, and have five sisters, some older and one just a year and a half younger. She and I are chums, because Bet likes all sorts of things boys like, and can't bear to sew, or play with dolls, or do any sort of thing most girls take to. Why, she used to play baseball with us, but mother stopped that. I'm telling you this because she enjoys your ALL-SPORTS just as much as I do. That's saying something, I guess, because I just dote on it. We read it together up in our den. And Bet, she likes the baseball stories very much indeed. You ought to see her throw a ball for keeps. I guess there are few girls can do it so well. And she loves the woods, too, and talks of traveling all the time. If I was camping out or cruising in a canoe, I believe I'd rather have my sister Bet along than any boy I know. She doesn't seem to be afraid of anything except a mouse and a spider. I've tried her with those, and the real girl showed up when she squealed and jumped on a chair. Yet she killed a rattlesnake as cool as you please last summer, when we were up in Penn. And I've seen her take a stick and chase a big dog down the street. My father reads your paper, too. He says he does it because he wants to make sure there's nothing in it to hurt our morals. But it seems funny to me that he reads it after we do, and even sent for every back number, buying us a nice file to keep them in. I guess he likes the stories some, too, because they remind him of the times when he was a boy. Well, I've written you quite a letter, but I only wanted to thank you for giving us such splendid, moral stories every week, and tell you how much we enjoy same. Please do not put in my name—Bet might not like it—but let me sign myself,

Elizabeth, N. J.

JACK LIGHTFOOT THE SECOND.

Thank you, my boy, for such a charming letter. It pleases us more than we can tell to know that ALL-SPORTS is such a welcome weekly guest in your home. Your parents are certainly of the right sort to bring up a family. That father of yours is, we imagine, a bit of a wag, too. He evidently knows a good thing when he sees it, and enjoys the stories about as well as you do. Somehow, he reminds us of the careful parent who is dragged to the circus every summer by his young hopeful. And as to Bet, she must be a jolly sister, after the type of Jo in "Little Women." You will do well to keep her as your "chum," and we rather surmise that, after a while, she will turn out to be a genius. That love for nature in a girl is apt to grow until it develops the spirit of a great author or an artist.

I have been reading the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY with interest. It seems to me that in criticising the author, as Philip Curtis did

in No. 22, when he said: "Mr. Stevens seems to think a fellow must be a sniveler and a sneak because he happens to be born well off," the writer shows that he has failed to understand the characters. Brodie and Kate Strawn and Tom Lightfoot are well off, and they are well spoken of; and, on the other hand, one of the meanest and lowest boys in Cranford is shown by the author to be one of the poorest in a money sense—I mean Nick Flint, of the Apache face and tiger heart. I think the author has tried to make it clear that it is not wealth or social position, nor the lack of these, that counts, but true manhood.

Columbus, Ohio.

X. Y. Z.

We are glad you have written in this strain, because there have been several complaints of this nature, and what you say answers them fully as well as we could have done ourselves.

I am a constant reader of your weekly, ALL-SPORTS, and I think they are the best that was ever printed in that line of books. I have read them from No. 1, therefore I take the liberty to ask a few questions. I am 16 years of age; 5 feet 3 inches in height; neck, 13¼ inches; calf, 12½ inches; chest, normal, 30 inches; expanded, 32 inches; thigh, 18¼ inches; waist, 27 inches; weight, 112 pounds; wrist, 6 inches. Can throw twelve-pound shot twenty feet. I smoke cigarettes a great deal. What is a good remedy for this habit? Kindly let me know my weak points and how to remedy them. Hoping to see this in print at your earliest convenience, DUKE MULLER.

96 Monticello Avenue, Jersey City, N. J.

Your weight is a bit above the average for your size; you lack several inches of the required chest measurements, while about the waist you excel. This is not right. It would be well for you to stop the cigarette habit entirely and pay attention to increasing your lung capacity while you are still young. If you keep on smoking, there is a serious possibility of your going into a decline before you are twenty, and perhaps consumption may take hold. Above all things, drop the cigarette habit at once, for your good sense tells you that it is harmful.

I have been reading ALL-SPORTS from the first number to the present. I think ALL-SPORTS is the best weekly, except the *Tip Top Weekly*. Would you mind answering a few questions? Is there a real Jack Lightfoot? How old is Jack? How tall is Jack? Where is Cranford situated? I like Jack; next, Lafe, Tom, Sken, Phil best. Hoping to see this in print, I remain, Beaumont, Tex.

A WELL-WISHER.

Really, now, it is hardly fair to ask us such questions. You must read the stories closely to find the answers to most of them. Doubtless Mr. Stevens knows where the originals of his clever characters may be found, for he is a New England man himself, and quite at home in Maine. We thank you for your good opinion.

I have been reading ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY ever since it came out. I think it is the best book for a boy to read if he is looking for exercise. Hoping that it will always be published,

MESSINGER No. 11,

New Orleans, La. National Postal Telegraph Company.

We appreciate your words of praise, and hope you will benefit from the stories you enjoy so much.

Having read ALL-SPORTS from No. 1 up to No. 27, and not having seen a letter from the city on the Merrimac, I thought I would write and let you know that the boys of the old Bay State know a good thing when they see it.

I have just finished reading the Chat column in No. 27, and noticed two letters that interested me deeply. I felt that one of them, from W. G., Logansport, Ind., needed answering, and I propose to start the ball rolling, hoping others will join me in protesting against W. G. I think if he had read ALL-SPORTS from the first number, as I have done, that he would voice different sentiments toward Jack. When he says Jack has a swelled head he is drawing the long bow, and I think a fellow who presumes to write and offer advice to such an able author as Mr. Stevens has proved himself to be, must have a touch of the same disease himself. So much for W. G. Now I will

refer briefly to the other letter, of which I spoke before. It is the letter from John J. Mullett, of Camden, N. J. He has, in many respects, voiced my opinion of Phil Kirtland, although I must say I was surprised to hear his opinion that Phil was keener than Jack. I certainly do not agree with him, and do not see how any fair-minded person can. I certainly admire Phil in many ways, and think he may, if handled right, be turned into a fine and noble character, and he surely has ability, if he can curb his pride and overcome his desire for admiration to a reasonable extent. I enjoy your weekly very much. I have a complete file of them, and would not sell them for a great deal unless I could replace them. I would be much pleased to see the Lightfoot cousins in foreign lands, and hope to one day, in the near future, learn that Tom's wandering spirit has taken him and Jack, with other friends, into strange countries. I will now close, as I have already taken up much space. Wishing Winner Publishing Company and Mr. Stevens all kinds of luck, I remain, a constant reader,

95 Essex Street, Lawrence, Mass.

HARRIE C. KNIGHTLY.

Being interested in the development of the body, and a reader of ALL-SPORTS from No. 1, I take the liberty to ask a few questions. I am 14 years old and weigh 100 pounds. My height is 5 feet 4 inches; chest, 30 inches; thigh, 17 inches; calf, 11 inches. Are my measurements over or under the standard? Is a bath after exercising harmful or beneficial?

A CONSTANT READER.

You weigh ten pounds too little for your height, though that may come from rapid growth, which is frequently the case with a fourteen-year-old boy. But your chest should measure something like thirty-three inches, normal, and it is now up to you to take regular exercise, with the idea of gaining several inches.

I would like you to tell me what you think of my measurements. I am 12 years old; height, 4 feet 7 inches; weight, 70 pounds; chest, 24 inches; expands 3 inches; waist, 23 inches; hips, 26½ inches; thighs, 15 inches; calf, 10½ inches. Hoping to find my measurements in the next issue,

J. M. ROY.

Lafayette, Ga.

You are undoubtedly small for your age; but wait a couple of years and doubtless a rapid growth will take place. Try and increase your chest and not the waist. That latter responds only too readily to a boy's appetite.

Allow us to congratulate Mr. Stevens as being the author, and yourselves as the publishers of such an excellent library as ALL-SPORTS. We have read every one from No. 1 up to date, and think it excellent reading. We are collecting souvenir postal cards, and any reader sending one will promptly receive one in return.

Strawberry shortcake,

Huckleberry pie,

V-i-c-t-o-r-y.

Are we in it? Well, I guess.

ALL-SPORTS, ALL-SPORTS—

Yes, yes, yes.

Yours, waiting for next number,

V. H. PELZ,

RAYMOND JACOBS.

237 East Eleventh Street, New York City.

That is the first christening we have received in the way of a college yell; but you are quite right when you say that ALL-SPORTS is "in it."

I have read your weekly from No. 1, and wish to express my admiration of it. Twenty-four numbers of a weekly are enough to judge whether it is good or not; but the ALL-SPORTS, one would like that from reading one page. I like the ALL-SPORTS because the characters do not perform feats that are impossible. I admire Jack best of all, and Tom, Lafe and the rest; but I've got a warm spot for Bob Brewster—there's something in him. Why doesn't the author write more of him? I would be glad to exchange souvenir postal cards with any of the readers. Will return all favors. Best wishes to ALL-SPORTS and Mr. Stevens.

Stillwater, Mich.

ROY KEER.

Thanks, Roy. We hope you will always keep a warm corner of your heart open to Jack and his friends.

HOW TO DO THINGS

By AN OLD ATHLETE.

Timely essays and hints upon various athletic sports and pastimes, in which our boys are usually deeply interested, and told in a way that may be easily understood. Instructive articles may be found in back numbers of the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY, as follows: No. 14, "How to Become a Batter." No. 15, "The Science of Place Hitting and Bunting." No. 16, "How to Cover First Base." No. 17, "Playing Shortstop." No. 18, "Pitching." No. 19, "Pitching Curves." No. 20, "The Pitcher's Team Work." No. 21, "Playing Second Base." No. 22, "Covering Third Base." No. 23, "Playing the Outfield." No. 24, "How to Catch." (I.) No. 25, "How to Catch." (II.) No. 26, "How to Run Bases." No. 27, "Coaching and the Coach." No. 28, "How to Umpire." No. 29, "How to Manage Players." No. 30, "Baseball Points." No. 31, "How to Make a Cheap Skiff." No. 32, "Archery." No. 33, "Cross-Country Running."

THE GAME OF LACROSSE.

Lacrosse is steadily increasing in popularity in the United States, and while it has long been considered almost the national game of Canada, as baseball is with us, some of our crack lacrosse teams have occasionally given our Canadian friends a hard tussle.

The Indians of the Northwest played a game greatly resembling lacrosse, and, in fact, from which lacrosse is derived, only their playing was cruder and rougher than the present-day game, the players oftentimes, in a heated moment, whacking their opponents over the head or shins with their sticks.

On a lacrosse team it is necessary for each man to play his particular position. When, before a game, the coach and captain pick the team, they select twelve men whom they think will make the strongest combination.

The most trouble in this line is generally found in new attack men. They have no confidence in the ability of their defense to take care of itself, and insist on going down to the help of the defense men when the ball stays down in that territory for any length of time. This is a great mistake. Keep your positions; because, if you go down, your opponent's defense will move out also, thus keeping the ball down in your territory. Even if you should get it, you would possibly carry it up the field about halfway, only to have it taken away from you because you have no one to help you and you are too tired to dodge through a fresh defense field. So keep your positions. What is the use of keeping your opponents from scoring if you cannot put the ball in the net yourself? "The minute that a team brings an extra man down on its defense, it is losing."

THE LINE-UP

Twelve men comprise a lacrosse team, and the positions are named as follows:

Inside Home.	Goal Keeper.
Outside Home.	Point.
First Attack.	Cover Point.
Second Attack.	First Defense.
Third Attack.	Second Defense.
Center.	Third Defense.
Third Defense.	Center.
Second Defense.	Third Attack.
First Defense.	Second Attack.
Cover Point.	First Attack.
Point.	Outside Home.
Goal Keeper.	Inside Home.

Two teams line up against each other, as shown above; the player's left side always toward the goal he is attacking. The attack should be in nearly a straight line

from center to in-home. The defense must adapt itself to the position taken by the opponent's attack.

There are two fundamental things upon which the style of play here described is based. First, a straight line is the shortest distance between two points; secondly, the oftener and the quicker a ball gets to the opponents' goal the better are the chances for your team to score.

THE FACE-OFF.

The ball is started from center, or, in lacrosse parlance, you "face-off." That is, the two opposing centers place their sticks back to back on the ground, and the ball is placed on the ground between them. Neither man is allowed to place his stick so as to scrape the knuckles of his opponent on "facing the ball." To begin the game, each center must draw his stick *straight toward himself*, and the ball becomes the property of the side which manages to get it.

HOW TO SHOOT GOALS.

Every beginner in lacrosse thinks that when he can place the ball within the limits of the six-foot square which comprises a goal, he knows how to shoot a goal. Such is not the case. A man should at least be able to hit a twelve-inch square five out of six times.

Experience has shown that a swift ball on a line with the goal man's waist worries him very much, because he cannot get his stick in place quick enough to stop it. The most goals, however, are made in the top corners of the net. This is due to the fact that it is so much easier to drop the stick to the ground and intercept low ones than raise it up in time for a ball around the head. Besides, it takes a more nervy man not to flinch at a swift ball buzzing by his head. Low balls, close to the goal keeper's feet, are practically of little value; they are stopped with great ease. On the other hand, the ball which strikes the ground about three feet from the goal line and bounds up under the keeper's arms or over his shoulder is very effective.

DODGING.

The art of dodging is a good thing when worked judiciously; but in team play it should be used only as a last resort—that is, when an attack player is left without assistance. The first step in dodging is to make a man hit at your stick. If he does this, it takes but little effort to go around him, because when he hits at your stick, you draw yourself away quickly, and the opponent, not meeting the resistance he expected, practically loses his balance.

When you buy lacrosse sticks, of course you should know that it is necessary to have something more than a mere curved stick, with some stringing of gut or hide—that is, you should know. There are as many different styles and shapes almost as there are players in the United States, and every one of them has some special claim that is put forward by the maker to help the sale of his special brand of sticks. Therefore, suit your individual taste, and practice will show you what style is best fitted to your work.

Some of the famous Iroquois tribe of Indians occasionally make lacrosse sticks, and the player who can obtain one of these is fortunate indeed.

Next week we shall have something to say, by special request, on the work of the young naturalist, and how he may, with profit, collect specimens of many strange things to be found in American forests and fields and water—after that, look out for football, since it is in the air.

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| 6—The Corsair Captain; or, Thad and His Chums Afloat. | 24—Capt. Kidd at Bay; or, Marooned On a Sand-Spit. |
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| 10—The Chest of Doubloons; or, How Three Boys Defied the Buccaneers. | 28—The Chase of the Slaver; or, Thad Among the Indigo Planters. |
| 11—The Rival Pirates; or, Thad and His Chums in Irons. | 29—Morgan's Coast Raiders; or, Thad at the Sacking of Maracaibo. |
| 12—Capt. Kidd's Stratagem; or, Simple Simon Takes Soundings. | 30—The Buccaneer's Ghost; or Thad's Adventures with the Pearl Divers. |
| 13—The <i>Red Raven's</i> Prize; or, How Young Thad Sailed a Pirate Barque. | 31—The Sea Cat; or, How Our Boys Held the Fort. |
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| 15—Capt. Kidd's Long Chase; or, Thad and His Chums in the Tropics. | 33—A Blue Water Free-Lance; or, Thad Adrift in a Leaking Pinnacle. |
| 16—Set Adrift by Pirates; or, Thad's Adventures in the Saragossa Sea. | 34—A Corsair of the Carribees; or, The Unlucky Silver "Pieces of Eight." |
| 17—To Sink or Swim; or, Thad and His Friends On Blue Water. | 35—On Pirate Island; or, The Battle of the Rival Sea Wolves. |
| 18—Capt. Kidd's Drag-Net; or, How Young Thad Hoodwinked the Buccaneers. | 36—In Tropic Seas; or, Thad's Strange Adventures at Hispaniola. |
| 19—The Phantom Pirate; or, Thad and His Chums on the Haunted Ship. | 37—The Specter Brig; or, Our Boys Afloat on a Raft. |
| 20—The Winged Witch; or, How Three Boys Saved the Treasure Galleon. | 38—The Young Marooners; or, What Thad Found on Treasure Island. |
| 21—Capt. Kidd in New Orleans; or, The Pirate Scourge of the Rigolets. | |

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